

NEW YORK

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ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER AT THE NEW YORK, N. Y., POST OFFICE.

April, 1900.

No. 1100.

Published Every
Month.

M. J. IVERS & CO., Publishers,
(JAMES SULLIVAN, PROPRIETOR),
379 Pearl Street, New York.

PRICE 5 CENTS.
50c. a Year.

Vol. XLIII.

DANDY DICK'S DEAD-LOCK.

BY ROBERT RANDOLPH INMAN.



IN A MOMENT MORE THE HEART-STRICKEN BARNEY WAS KNEELING AT THE MOTIONLESS DANDY DICK'S SIDE.

Dandy Dick's Dead-lock;

OR,

The Last Round at Nip-'n'-Tuck.

BY ROBERT R. INMAN,

AUTHOR OF "DANDY DICK" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE INVISIBLE SEVEN.

JERKY JAKE awoke with a start, and as he stared about him his face and arms jerked and twitched in a way that told how excited he was.

His eyes opened to their widest, his hair rose on end—or seemed to, and that amounted to the same thing; and as he stared he had to put the corner of his jacket into his mouth to prevent his chattering teeth from betraying his presence.

A word about this personage before we disclose what it was he saw.

Jerky Jake was a denizen of the camp of Nip-'n'-Tuck, which was only a few miles distant from the place where we discover him.

He was a young man, not over twenty-four, perhaps, and not by any means a fool, but he was horribly afflicted with chorea, or Saint Vitus's dance, and owing to that had been given the nickname "Jerky" Jake.

His affliction was bad enough at ordinary times, but when he was excited it was much worse, and he was an object of pity as well as of curiosity.

As a last resort he had tried the hot springs, but while there his money gave out, so he was stranded; and his father dying at about the same time, he had no one to aid him, and had drifted around among the mining-camps, getting his living as best he could, in an honest way.

At present, he was a denizen of the camp of Nip-'n'-Tuck, and had put himself under the care of one Doctor Conrad, as a charity subject, but had finally been informed that there was little or no hope for him. And from that moment he had settled into a dull despair, awaiting patiently for death to come to his relief.

Sometimes his affliction was worse than at others, and at such times, being exceedingly sensitive, he would wander off into the hills and spend a day or two in seclusion, returning when he was better. He was out upon one of these periods of self exile now, and had been away from the camp for three days. He was on his return, and had lain down to sleep in an inviting spot, intending to push on to the camp at day-break.

The place he had selected for his night's repose was in a deep, woody glade, where the intense shadows made it semi-dark even at noontide, and where by night the darkness was utterly impenetrable. Here were gigantic boulders, with fragments of rock from the overhanging cliff, and upon one of this cliff's several shelves the tired and hungry "Jerky" had clambered, there to make his rude bed, expecting to pass a night of unbroken sleep. But, that his expectation was not realized our opening words declare.

It was the sound of voices that had awakened him.

When he opened his eyes, the first thought was of fire, for the glade seemed to be in a blaze.

As he sat up, however, and looked from the rim of his high, rocky bed, he beheld a sight that caused his nervous excitement as we have depicted it.

To attempt to portray what his distorted imagination led him to believe he saw, at the first look, were futile. He believed the glade to be peopled with a horde of ghostly demons, almost without number, holding a sort of high carnival; and the sight associated with itself the idea that they meant ill to him.

But a second and more deliberate look enabled him to take in the scene as it really was, and that was bad enough, in all conscience.

Just below the rock upon which he lay, or at most only a few yards from it, were seven figures in white, each that of a man, evidently, and each bearing a torch.

Nothing of their persons was to be seen. The gowns they had on were long and loose, with great draping sleeves, and with cowls of the same material in which were holes for the eyes. To these cowls were broad capes. Little wonder the sight caused the nerve-unstrung Jake to start in extreme alarm.

The torches they were holding high over their

heads, as they stood in a half circle, holding them in their left hands, while the right hands of the seven—seven there were of them—were held up and out with the fists clinched. So they stood when the astonished eyes of Jerky Jake first rested upon them, and to his startled senses and his quickened hearing came the words, in deep tones: "We swear, we swear!"

Remaining as still as his affliction would allow him to be, with the corner of his jacket in his mouth for the reason given, he lay down upon the rock, his eyes peering above and around.

"And the name we shall bear, should men come to know of us," one of the weird figures spoke, "shall be the Invisible Seven."

"Yes, yes, yes."

"Invisible, because no man hath seen us."

"Nor is any man likely to see us. Our operations are to be so subtle and secret that only chance can betray us."

"And our meetings must be few and far between. Our scheme is so perfected that only the most imperative emergency will make it necessary for us to come here for another council."

"Everything seems to be arranged, and nothing left undone. From this hour begins our work, and woe to the man who opposes us or who incurs our enmity. Nothing must be allowed to endanger our safety. Our game is large, our risks great, so we must stop at nothing to insure us victory, ever and always!"

"Well, men of the Seven, as all is arranged, we have no excuse for remaining here longer. I am your captain, according to your own choice, and my every order must be obeyed, unquestioned. Upon no other condition will I undertake the command. But, I think you can have full confidence in me. As no man can know of us, and our operations are to be so subtle as to defy detection, you will find my leadership as silent as an arm touch, or an eye signal, and yet the obedience must be as sure and utter as if the word of command had been given in thunder tones. Now we are done; the light must know us no more. Out with your torches, men, and the Invisible Seven are invisible indeed! Are you ready, one and all? Then out they go!"

There was a pool of water at hand, and into that the captain hurled his torch, the others immediately following his example, and darkness covered all.

CHAPTER II.

A SIGNIFICANT DEATH.

Poor Jerky Jake lay still, as still as he could, to listen.

It was darker than dark now—intensely, painfully black—such darkness as might almost be felt.

After the last torch had spluttered out, in the pool, not a sound was heard for some seconds. Then the grass and bushes were heard to rustle slightly, but only for a few brief seconds. After that all was still.

Jake listened for a long time before he ventured upon taking the corner of his jacket from between his chattering jaws.

But the stillness of the night remained unbroken, and at last he felt assured that he must be alone.

The nervous twitching of his face and arms had gradually subsided, till they were almost calm, as he lay there on the hard rock thinking about what he had seen.

Who had been these men? What was their mission? What did they intend doing? Questions he found it impossible to answer.

It must be, he finally decided, that they were outlaws, and his duty was plain. He must hasten to Nip-'n'-Tuck in the morning and tell the citizens what he had heard and seen.

He regretted that he had not heard and seen more, for it was plain to him that he had slept through it all until very near the time of his leaving the spot, and he had missed more than he had heard. Perhaps he would have heard some important secrets.

But, he had missed it, and there was no help for it.

It was too dark for him to leave the rock, even had he desired; so he lay still—lay, thinking, till at last his nerves grew quiet, and finally he fell sound asleep again and knew no more until daylight.

When he awoke it was with a nervous start, and immediately his affliction asserted itself and his face twitched and his arms jerked horribly, as he stood up and looked about him.

The glade was as lonely and silent as though no human had ever been there, and at first the unfortunate young man was inclined to think his vision of the night had been only a dream. But, no; for there in the pool lay the torches, seven in number!

Feeling the importance of the secret he held, Jerky Jake rolled up his blanket, tied it, and clambering down from his lofty bed, set his face in the direction of the camp and started off, jerking his way through the glade toward a trail that ran along by it half a mile away.

An hour later he jerked his way into the camp and into the Big Horn Saloon.

This was his headquarters, for he had made friends with the proprietor who boarded him for whatever light work he could do around the premises.

There were few in the saloon at this hour, for most of the citizens had gone to their work, but the proprietor was behind the bar, and greeted the unfortunate in a cordial manner.

This man's name was Goodman Crawley, but he was more familiarly known as simply "Goody Crawl."

"Hello, Jerky; back again, are you?" was his greeting.

"Y-y-yes," Jerky jerked out; "I'm b-back again. And I have something t-to tell ye, too."

"Somethin' to tell us, bey?" repeated Goody. "Well, now, what is it, Jerky? Is it good news, bad news, or no news at all?"

"I d-don't know what k-kind of news you'll c-call it, Goody, b-but I don't believe you'll s-say it's good. If I d-don't mistake, there's a b-band of outlaws around."

"What?"

"I s-say I think there's a b-band of outlaws around."

Jake's constant twitching and jerking caused him to stutter slightly whenever a word and a jerk came together.

"A band of outlaws! What makes you think that? Come, if you know anything, out with it. If there's outlaws about, b'gosh we want to know it!"

Jake went ahead and told what he had seen, and the proprietor of the Big Horn listened with close attention.

"Thunder and blitzen!" he ejaculated, when Jerky had finally uttered his story; "you must be mistaken, Jerky. You must 'a' dreamed it all, didn't you?"

But that Jerky denied, and gave the proof of it.

The story soon spread, and considerable excitement in the camp ensued, of course.

Reports of recent outlaw doings in other parts of the county were fresh, and the name of Devil Duval, the chief of outlaws, was familiar to all. In fact, placards of reward for him were to be seen everywhere. He was a much "wanted" man.

Why this report raised excitement, then, can be readily understood.

Everybody was interested, from Simon Slow, the marshal, down to the meanest digger in the mines.

For a time nothing else was talked about, and poor Jerky Jake was questioned and cross-questioned until he was made so excessively nervous that it seemed as though he would jerk his head off.

The excitement gradually died away, however, and by the time the evening's usual carousal was under way it had been temporarily forgotten, while at midnight it was as though it had never been heard of. It was brought to mind next morning, though, when poor Jerky Jake was found lying in the street stark and stiff—dead!

CHAPTER III.

VIRTUOUS INDIGNATION AROUSED.

FOR a quiet, orderly place like Nip-'n'-Tuck, this was a discovery well calculated to raise a breeze.

Immediately came back the story poor Jerky Jake had told, and his death was set down as the work of the Invisible Seven, but upon examination it was found that neither knife nor bullet had done the deed, which fact silenced that inference; and when, finally, upon a thorough examination of the body, Doctor Conrad announced that death had resulted from natural causes, the suspicious ones had no more to say. But, all the same, the name of the Invisible Seven was upon every lip.

"Poor Jerky!" sighed one good citizen, "he hev jerked his last jerk on 'arbh. Ther 'citement of what he seen last night must 'a' been too rich fer his blood, an' he couldn't stand it. May he rest in peace, ter jerk no more, pore cuss!"

"He never done no good ner harm ter nobody," another eulogized, "an' if thar's a neutral spot anywhar over thar whar he's gone, I hope he'll git a front seat."

Other such comments, with good wishes for

the repose of the poor fellow's better part, were heard on every hand.

Before noon he had been laid away.

The recollection of what he had told, however, still burned in mind, and the more it was talked about the more significant it appeared to the experienced denizen.

The Invisible Seven was accepted as an established fact, and the mystery concerning the band aroused the keenest curiosity. In the general mind dwelt the fear and dread of Duval the Outlaw, and it was believed that this must be he and his evil band.

This view of the matter became so strong that a public meeting was called, to discuss the question and to take action.

Just here we may give a brief sketch of this town of Nip-n-Tuck and her citizens.

It was, first, a most thriving and prosperous mining-camp, which rather prided itself upon its respectability. That was one of its strong points, and which it ever stood ready to defend.

There were two rich mines, each having a large number of employees and doing a big business. Then there were two hotels, several stores, some saloons and many neat cottages. In truth, Nip-n-Tuck had outgrown its "camp" stage, and was now a pretty village.

But the old and rough name still clung to the place, though there had been more than one effort made to have it changed into something a little more refined. The name was near and dear to the hearts of the old residents, and as they had been in the majority to the present, every effort made in the direction of a change had been defeated.

The leader of the new party was Doctor Conrad, the directing spirit of the place, perhaps. The strength of the old party rested in Ham Stanton, who was one of the oldest citizens, and, as was said of him, a man full of "sand." At the last local election it had been a hard fight between the old party and the new for the office of marshal, the old party winning by only four votes, and electing Simon Slow to the office.

Simon Slow was a little man, but one who had a massive head upon his shoulders, whether there was anything in it or not. It had been a time of great jubilee for the old party, for it had been a hard fight from first to last, and every step had been hotly contested. And it was made the more of, since it was looked upon as the last victory the "old guard" would ever achieve. As Ham Stanton had declared, his candidate was a little Slow, he knew, but he got there just the same; and to which the other side had retorted that he would be too slow ever to do it again.

All of which is set forth so that the reader may get a correct impression of the situation at the time of our romance.

Of the leading citizens, the first was, as said, Doctor Conrad. His name was Dermot, but it was seldom heard, and on his sign it was Dr. D. Conrad. Second to him, perhaps, was the one lawyer of the place, Mr. Gaspar J. Corker, a legal luminary of no mean magnitude—in his own mind. Other names, to mention them casually for the time being, were George Pierre, Baldwin Bloome, and Ambrose Bray.

When the public meeting assembled, as mentioned, Lawyer Corker was called to the chair as being the man best fitted for the duty; and forthwith he proceeded to state the object and purpose of the gathering.

"Friends and fellow-citizens," he addressed the crowd, "we are here for the purpose of looking into a certain matter that has been brought to our notice. We have reason to believe that the peace and morality of our town are to be endangered by a band of outlaws. Further, we may be justified in holding the suspicion that the notorious Devil Duval is at the head of the band. If such be the case, some action of the right sort ought to be taken immediately. This town will never harbor evil-doers, knowingly, and a note of warning to them should be sounded forthwith. What is your pleasure, friends, in so important a matter?"

Ham Stanton generally made it a point to get in a lick for his side first, if he could, and being no stranger to the rules of order of a public meeting, he was upon his feet instantly, ready to contend for the "floor."

Glaring around for a moment, to see whether anybody was going to oppose him, he addressed the chair.

"Mister Chair an' feller pilgrims," he spoke, "thar is one p'int on which you new galoos an' we old citizens agree to agree, an' that ar' that ther goodness of this hyar camp must be presarved!"

"Hear!" "Hear!"

"Must be presarved, I say, Mister Chair an'

feller pilgrims. If this hyar Devil Duval is goin' ter show his nose hyar, we must be ready fer him. What we want ter do is, ter git a rope ready an' let him know that we means biz right from ther word Go. That's ther sentymint of yourn truly, an' I'm hyar ter back it, b'gosh!"

And with that, Mr. Stanton sat down to the tune of loud applause.

Doctor Conrad was the next to claim the privilege of the floor, and as soon as he could be heard, said:

"Mr. Chairman, it seems to me, at the very beginning, that the public mind is bent in one direction wholly. I agree with what Mr. Stanton has said, and he seems to have expressed it all, in his own forcible way. While I cannot agree with the gentleman on all questions, I can and do agree with him in this one. At any cost we must preserve our good name. No outlaw must be allowed to get foothold here. Prompt and effective warning must be given, so that this fellow may know what to expect. None but honest men are wanted here."

There was more cheering, as the doctor sat down, and the next man to take up the subject was Rev. Ambrose Bray, the one preacher of the town.

Oh, yes; Nip-n-Tuck had a church—another strong argument in favor of its having a new name.

"Dear brethren," the parson spoke, "it does me good to see you so determined in a matter of this sort. I admire your spirit. We must, at all hazards, preserve inviolate the good name of our town, and this is the right way to do it. Let us frown upon everything that would tend to demoralize our morals and good name. If this terrible outlaw is near us, he must be made to know what our stand is going to be, and perhaps he will have the good sense to stay away. If he has not, if fair warning does no good, then we must rise in our might and smite him—smite him hip and thigh, as it were!"

And with that grand climax, the Reverend Bray sat down, to the echo of more and still louder applause.

And such seemed to be the sentiment of the crowd, as one speaker followed another in this rather original way, and finally Doctor Conrad rose and offered a motion, as follows:

"Fellow-citizens, I beg to submit this as a motion for your consideration. I have shaped it in writing while the others have been expressing their feelings upon the matter, and have tried to make it acceptable to all and objectionable to none. Allow me to read:

"Whereas, We, the good citizens of Nip-n-Tuck (we are not all in accord respecting the name), having learned of the presence of outlaws near us, do rise up in the strength of our indignation and declare our displeasure. And,

Resolved, That we are determined that this town shall not suffer at their hands, nor harbor them for one hour knowingly; therefore, be it—

"Resolved, That we, the citizens of Nip-n-Tuck (divided though we may be respecting the name), do hereby warn the aforesaid outlaws not to enter our town at any time under any pretext, under penalty of arrest and punishment forthwith in all haste and in manner severe. And, be it—

"Resolved, That copies of this be written and posted along the several trails, at a distance not less than one mile from this town, so that he who runs may read—as it were; and that we hereby make known in manner plain that we are and ever intend to be a people who will foster crime in no degree or form, knowingly, and will not risk our good name ourselves nor allow others to endanger it."

Cheering greeted the rather unique offering, but there was no spirit of criticism in the crowd, all being of one mind, seemingly; and when the motion was put it was passed without a dissenting voice.

About the time the resolutions passed, a stranger rode up—a stranger in black, clerical garb, mounted upon a meek and humble-spirited horse—who stopped on the outer edge of the crowd and looked on, as though with interest secondary to some greater theme.

CHAPTER IV.

NOTES SOME NEW ARRIVALS.

THE public meeting had been held out of doors, in front of the leading hotel opposite the principal saloon.

A permanent place for this sort of thing had been arranged, with a stand for the chairman or judge, as the case might be, and benches for the crowd.

The stand was under a big tree, and the benches being loose and light, it was easy to move them around to suit the situation to the shade of the tree. When the weather was

unfavorable, then the Big Horn Saloon was made use of instead.

It was handy, in all respects. If it happened to be a case where "Judge Lynch" had to preside, and the accused was found guilty, there was the tree right at hand, and it took little time to carry out the sentence. And, then, too, the virtue of the town had not risen above the "spiritual," at the bar.

The business being over, attention was turned to this stranger and Doctor Conrad addressed him:

"Stranger, you can see the sort of people we are here."

"Is some poor, lost sinner about to be hanged?" the stranger asked, in measured tone.

"Why, no; didn't you hear the reading of the resolutions that were just adopted? Bless me, but you must not miss them."

"I heard them not," was the response. "I just came up as your vote was being taken. But I am glad to know that life is not at stake. Thou shalt not kill, saith the Lord."

"I take it you are a parson," rejoined the doctor. "If you are, we welcome you to our midst. We are a people determined to defend our honor with our lives. We take no life except as a last resort for some desperate crime—say horse-stealing. But, let me read."

And with that, Doctor Conrad read the preamble and resolutions aloud once more, for the benefit of the stranger.

"That is good, very good," the stranger parson approved. "I am proud that my steps have led me this way. Have you a preacher here? I see you have a church."

"A preacher! Well, I should say so! What would be a village such as ours without its parson? This gentleman, sir," pointing to Rev. Ambrose Bray, "is our light on the hill."

The Rev. Bray stepped forward.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing one of the cloth, sir?" he inquired.

"You have," was the prompt assurance. "I am Rev. Day Lancelot Joy. I am a traveling preacher, making the whole world my field."

"I am glad to know you, Brother Joy. My name is Ambrose Bray. Allow me to welcome you to our village of Nip-n-Tuck—we hope to give it a more imposing name some of these days;—and to offer you the shelter of my humble abode during your sojourn among us."

"Ther name are plenty good enough fer us old citizens, stranger," spoke up Ham Stanton, "an' we happens ter be in ther majority."

A glance at the old man, and the stranger responded to Bray.

"I gladly accept your offer, Brother Bray," he said. "And if you can make use of me, you have but to command. As for the name of your place, it seems to me strikingly appropriate."

"Appropriate! How do you make that out?" This from Doctor Conrad.

"It generally is nip and tuck between the Word and the devil," was the parson's response, "and the more so in these camps of the West that are rising to the dignity of villages. Make no change of name, I would say, till victory is won."

"There is something in that," said the Rev. Bray, thoughtfully.

"Yas, thar's a good deal in it," affirmed Ham Stanton. "If a change o' name is ter foller ther success of yer preachin, ye had better go slow. Take that as jest a gentle hint; eh, Marshal?"

"I should opine so," Marshal Slow drawled out.

"Not that some of us mightn't git converted," added Ham, "but you kin never convert us so bad as to make us want ter change ther name of our camp, an' don't think ye kin."

"It are not a tall likely," supported Marshal Slow. "Nip-n-Tuck are ther name what we fit, bled an' died fer; an' we're ready ter fight, bleed an' die fer it ergain, if need be. Don't monkey with ther name of our town, mister."

"How came it by so odd a name?" inquired the stranger.

"Ther story are soon told," volunteered Mr. Stanton. "When we fu'st anchored hyar we had ter fight fer ther place. A band o' p'izen Injuns wanted it, ye see, an' fu'st one side would git ousted, an' then t'other, till it was jest nip an' tuck ter see which was goin' ter prove boss of ther situation; an' so ther camp kem ter be called. Its name afore that war sich as wouldn't sound well in perlite sassiety, an' Nip-n-Tuck war a big improve."

"No one can blame you, then, for wanting to stick to the old name," the new-comer conceded. "I shall not preach against your side, my dear man."

"Bully fer you!" cried Ham, promptly. "Reckons you is white, mister, an' we is ready ter back ye up."

"But I am earnest for honor and uprightness," the stranger added, in his deep tone, "and I preach the truth and spare not. I shoot the bolts of vengeance, let the victim be who it may."

"You will do," cried the doctor, who had now descended from the platform. "I am free to say that on the point of honesty and truth we are all agreed, and if that is your platform you are at home here at Nip-n-Tuck. You will do, I repeat, and were it not for your calling I would invite you over to take something."

"Then your virtue and goodness have not risen above that, eh?"

"Heavens, sir, do you expect to find angels on earth?"

This raised a laugh, and in the break the two parsons went off arm in arm in the direction of Bray's abode, Joy leaving his horse to the care of a man whom Bray had recommended.

The business over, for the time, the crowd rapidly dispersed, going to the hotels and various saloons, most of them, to wet their virtuous whistles; while Lawyer Corker took the new-made ordinance for the purpose of preparing the required copies.

By this time the sun was getting low, and the daily stage might be expected at any time within the hour. The coming of the stage was an event of no mean importance.

As the time wore on, the crowd began to re-assemble around the leading hotel, saloon, and the post-office, and presently the rumble of the coming stage was heard, and a little later it burst into view around a bend and came thundering on toward the hotel, bringing with it a cloud of dust.

A few moments more and the Jehu brought it to a short stop in front of the United States—the name of the leading hotel.

"Whoop! you pesky critters, whoop!" he cried, bringing them down with a sharp turn. "Hyar we is ergain, fellers; hyar's yer Uncle Josey, fresh from ther other side of ther range. How do I find ye all?"

While speaking, he had thrown down the lines, and as he finished he threw out the mail which he had fished up from the box.

Suitable response to his remarks was made by one and another in the crowd, while the passengers were getting out and down.

On top of the stage, the center of interest, was a personage whom we may take the space to describe. He was, plainly, an Italian, if appearance was to be trusted, for he was swarthy, with black hair and eyes, while a pair of gold hoop earrings were in his ears.

He was roughly clad, and apparently none too clean, personally. In his arms he held a hideous little monkey in red jacket and cap. Strapped to the rack of the stage was a barrel-organ of the usual sort. Taken all together, it was self-explaining: an Italian organ-grinder had come to town.

Two others from the top had got down while the driver was throwing out the mail and other stuff, and the "insiders" were stepping out, but the Italian clung to his place as if determined to be the last.

One of those who descended from the top was a man of very red hair and beard, who carried his blanket in a long roll, as though he had half a fence-rail in it.

The inside passengers were two women, both of dark complexion, and were evidently Mexican.

One of them was careful to assist the other to alight, and it was noticed that this one was blind.

When both were out, the blind one stood still while the other reached within and drew out a violin case and some other packages.

These secured, she took the hand of her blind companion, and leading her, approached the United States and entered, disappearing from sight. And the crowd then gave its undivided attention to the Italian and his monkey.

CHAPTER V.

THE "DAGO" AND "DA MONK."

"Come, Italy," sung out Uncle Josey, the driver, "are ye goin' ter stay up thar all night?"

"Hava we gotta here?" the Italian innocently asked, as he raised partly up, his monkey pressed close to his breast. "Is dissa da place?"

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed the driver. "In course we has got hyar, you durn furren Dago!

Come, git down from thar, now, and screw up yer organ 'n' give ther people a tune."

The fellow got up, at that, and allowing the monkey to perch upon his shoulders, proceeded to climb down, in his clumsy fashion.

As soon as he was upon the ground he grinned as he ducked his head to the crowd and looked around.

"Da 'Mericano peop' maka da bigga fuss," he observed, in his quaint way.

A score or more were throwing jests at him, all at once, and the rest of the crowd was laughing.

"Get out yer grinder, Italy, and give us a tune," one urged. "You is a new institution out hyar, an' it will make us fellers think of home. Git her out, now, an' grind up."

"Don'ta monka witha da monk," the Italian requested, seriously, looking around to find out who it was throwing quids of tobacco at the animal. "Don'ta monka witha da monk Nicolo; make him ver' mad—mea, too."

"Don't monkey with the munk is it ye say?" called out one. "He's a darn bad 'pology fer a monkey, if he can't take a little foolin' like that. Reckon he'll have ter git used ter it, if he stays hyar long."

"But da monk him gitta ver' mad—mea too. You monka witha mea, mea no gitta mad; but da monk him gitta ver' mad. Will da 'Mericano taka down da banda organ for mea? Mea play one tune, da nice-a-tune—maka da monk clappa da hands, sol. Da monk, he one gooda boy if no monka with him; mea too."

"Yas, yas, git down ther grind-box, Josey!" was the demand. "Let's hear what fer a tune ther Dago kin play, anyhow."

Uncle Josey was already making a move in that direction, and soon the organ was placed in its owner's hands, and he speedily made it ready for business.

Putting its one leg under the bottom, and securing the strap and getting it into place over his shoulders, he laid hold of the crank and the monkey sprung down on top of the box.

A little adjusting, and the fellow began to turn the crank and grind out The Little Brown Jug in a way that was enough to have made the author of that classic air die in despair could he have heard it. It was simply agony condensed and intensified; and as the fellow played, the monkey skipped and danced around on top, bowing this way and that, and keeping it up until the music ceased, when the creature took off its cap and held it out invitingly for contributions. All of which was huge fun for the crowd.

"Don'ta foola da monk," the Italian cautioned. "Dat maka da monk ver' mad—mea too. Da bada boy foola him—mea too; putta da peanutti shell in da cap, maka da monk lose-a da penny. No foola de monk, no foola mea; putta in da gooda penny—alla da same gooda dolla' too. Mea play da nice-a tune da next time, youa betto!"

So chattered the Italian, while "da monk" was passing around the hat, but little attention was paid to him, the monkey being the center of attraction.

Many were there who had never seen a monkey before, and it was an object of the greatest curiosity to them, especially.

Dimes and quarters dropped into the cap liberally, to the delight of monkey and master alike.

When the collection had been taken, the Italian took charge of it, of course, and adjusting his organ anew, turned the crank to the tune of another air almost as ancient as the first.

While this was going on, the two women who had entered the hotel had sent for the landlord and inquired about board and lodging.

They were, one explained, twin sisters, and were Mexican. They were traveling on an extended tour, giving musical entertainments with the object of raising money to clear off the debt on their homestead estate in Mexico.

Their names, according to the one who took it upon herself to do the talking for both, were Clara or Clarita and Elena Gomez, though on their bills they passed under the names of Mlle. Claire and Mlle. Helene—the French of their names proper. The one, as could be seen without need of calling attention to it, was blind.

Such, in brief, was what they explained of themselves to the landlord, and one of the best rooms in the United States was assigned to them for use during their stay at Nip-n-Tuck.

These women were not old, nor were they very young. Both were fairly good-looking, but neither could be called beautiful, and their attire was plain.

The other passengers who had come by the stage had gone immediately into the bar room of the hostelry. One of these, the fellow of the

red hair and beard who carried his blanket so peculiarly rolled, was of age uncertain, though at a guess about thirty.

And as to his nationality, that was even more uncertain than his age, at the first study, though it might have been set down as either English or Scotch.

When he was heard to speak, however, all doubt upon that point was set at rest, for he proved to be cockney English. His tongue juggled with the "H" in a way that was not to be doubted. Yet there was, withal, something of an Irish accent in the tone.

Having inquired about the terms, and haggled not a little over them, this man finally made his bargain at the desk, and engaged a room.

That done, he had his attention called to the register, and taking up the pen he wrote his name—Donald McGregor Tiff.

He was, as he then explained, a Scotch-Irish Englishman—whatever that might mean, and was simply traveling to see the sights, with plenty of wealth and abundance of time at his command.

During this time the Italian had been grinding away at his organ, dishing up music of the very stalest kind in the most disjointed and inharmonious fashion, to the amusement of the crowd.

Finally, after a few turns at The Sweet By and By with variations—remarkable variations, he stopped, saying:

"Not any more disa time. Da monk he ver' tired, da monk he ver' hongry—mea too. Mea play notta any more to-day; to-mor' mea play alla da time. Da monk Nicolo he ver' gooda boy; me like-a him ver' much."

While speaking thus, he was adjusting his organ for carrying, and now, with "da monk" on his shoulders, marched toward the hotel.

Into the bar-room he went, box, monkey and all, and straight to the desk and addressed the clerk.

"Mea wanta grub, alla da same da monk too," he announced.

"But we don't harbor your sort here," declared the clerk. "Get out, and go to some cheaper place."

"Noa; mea no getta out," the fellow protested. "Mea gotta plenta da rock, mea pay up alla da same 'Mericano. Da monk high-a tone, alla da same mea too."

"Can't help how high-toned you are," returned the clerk, "we can't allow you to stop here, and that settles it. This hotel is first-class, I'd have you know. Get out with you!"

"Mea no getta grub?" the fellow parleyed.

"Not a bite here."

"Mea no getta da sleep?"

"Nixey. Git!"

"Maka da monk feel ver' bad; mea, too. Gotta plenta da money; plenta da money noa good? Mea no play for you; alla da same da monk no clappa da hands."

And with that, and a scowl upon his face, the "Dago" lifted his organ, with "da monk" mounted on top of it, and left the room, to the laughter of all present, and evidently to his own disgust.

"Ther Peach Blow are ther shebang you want ter tackle, Dago," a man on the piazza directed him.

"Da Peacha Blow?" repeated the Italian.

"Yas; that's another hotel, an' one whar they ain't so 'tarnel p'tic'lar. It is right down thar whar ye see ther blue sign swingin'."

The "Peach Blow" was a hotel of which Marshal Slow was proprietor, and, as the Italian had been informed, it was not so choice in the matter of selecting its guests. Everything was taken that came along.

Thanking the well-meaning citizen for the information he had volunteered, the organ-grinder went off to try his luck at the Peach Blow, some of the loungers around following him to see how he would make out, and to witness further the capers of the monkey.

Arriving there, the Italian marched boldly in and to the bar, the same as he had done at the United States.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PARSONS PERPLEXED.

MARSHAL SLOW's man looked up in surprise. He had seen the Italian enter the United States, and had no idea that he would be allowed to look further for accommodations.

There was a great spirit of rivalry between the hotels at Nip-n-Tuck, and as the larger one had generally the lion's share of the trade, the Peach Blow had to take up with what was left.

It was a rare thing that a guest was allowed to pass on to the rival, no matter what his race,

color or previous condition. Every man counted one, and every one was one less for the rival institution. But here, it seemed, the United States had at last drawn the line.

There was no denying that the Peach Blow was a second-grade hotel, as compared to the other, but this was the first time the United States had allowed any crumbs to fall from its table for the profit of its rival. And hence it was that Jerry Duffey felt the surprise he did. He thought it strange the fellow had been allowed to come to the Peach Blow.

"Mea wanta grub; alla da same da monk too," the Italian announced.

"All right," responded Jerry. "I guess we can fix you out; but, why didn't they keep you at the other place?"

"Alla da same too high-a tone," was the answer. "No suita da monk—mea too. We wanta da grub, da sleep. Mea gotta da rock, mea pay alla da same 'Mericano. Mea no slouch."

This threw a new light upon the matter. Jerry believed the other establishment had appeared too fine for the "Dago," and he had come on his own accord.

And Jerry was glad of this, too, for the thought had come to him to refuse, to show the rival that the Peach Blow would take none of its leavings, ill as the house could afford to be so independent.

"All right, Italy; we'll try and fix you out. What is your name?"

"Mea nama Giuliano Huppazuli," the Italian gave it.

"Wh-what did you say?"

"Giuliano Huppazuli," the Italian repeated.

"Good heavens! what a name to go to bed with!" the bewildered Jerry exclaimed. "Jool-yahno Hooppadoo! Great Scott! how do you spell it?"

"Mea no can spella him," the musician confessed.

"What! can't spell your own name?"

"Noa; mea no spella him—alla same da monk. Mea no can reada, no canna write him. 'Melicane write-a him."

"Hang me if I'll ever do it," muttered Jerry, in a tone of despair. "I'll set you down as Jooly Hoopdooly, and it will have to go at that. It's a wonder to me that you ever lived to grow up."

Accordingly, the clerk put the fellow's name down that way, and "Jooly" was shown to his humble room in the extreme rear of the building.

Having deposited his barrel organ in a safe corner, he returned to the bar-room with the monkey, and there fell to making himself agreeable while he waited for supper.

Meanwhile copies of the latest enactment had been written out by Lawyer Corker for placarding, and several had been put up around the village.

Besides these, messengers had been sent out to post them up along the trails leading to the town, as required by a clause in one of the articles. Nip-'n'-Tuck was determined to defend its virtue and good name.

About the hour when lamps were beginning to be lighted and when all Nip-'n'-Tuck had had supper and was out upon the street, two men came sauntering down the street arm in arm in the direction of the United States Hotel. And these men were Rev. Ambrose Bray and his guest.

They were clinging closer than brothers, and each was seemingly trying to outdo the other in the matter of deportment. The Rev. Bray was explaining points of interest as they passed along, and the Rev. Day Lancelot Joy was paying all polite attention, questioning or commenting frequently as the occasion required. They were head and shoulders above the common herd.

Men eyed them as they passed, and perhaps with envy, for to judge them by their looks they were a little better than common flesh and blood—walked on a higher plane, as it were.

"Would it shock you, Brother Joy," remarked Bray, as they drew near the hotel, "were I to ask you to come in?"

"It certainly would shock me, Brother Bray," was the answer; "but, believing your motive to be good, I think I could stand the shock. Let us go in, if you so desire."

"Very well, we will do so. How can we know men as they are, unless we rub elbows with publicans and sinners?"

"True, true. Lead right on and I will follow."

The two ascended the steps of the piazza and entered the bar-room.

Here were some of the leading spirits of the place, Doctor Conrad, Lawyer Corker, Baldwin

Bloome, George Pierre, and others; all of whom spoke politely to the reverend gentlemen.

Bray introduced Joy here and there, and presently the pair sat down for a quiet talk while they made a study of the human nature about them.

While they were thus engaged a woman entered the room.

It was one of the Mexican sisters who had come by the stage, and in her hand she held a rolled paper.

Without much attention to any one she crossed to the desk and spoke to the clerk for a moment, and leaving the paper with him, went out.

"Who was that?" asked the Rev. Joy.

"I do not know," answered the Rev. Bray.

They had watched her till she left the room, and now together looked toward the clerk.

He had unfolded the paper and was reading it, and presently, when he had satisfied his curiosity, he stepped out from behind his place and crossed over toward a bulletin board.

In crossing, he had to pass right near the two parsons, and when he came near the Rev. Bray asked:

"What have you there, Charlie?"

"Notice of the concert to-morrow night," was explained.

"Concert? Where is there to be a concert? This is bad, very bad," turning to his companion.

"Very bad indeed," the other reverend agreed.

"But, the devil is always at hand to hinder the good work if he can."

"Why," answered the clerk to the question that had been put by Bray, "it's the two women who came by the stage. They are going to give a grand concert to-morrow night in the Big Horn."

"Ungodly creatures!" cried Bray, lifting his hands.

"Can we not defeat their evil designs?" queried Day.

"I don't see how it is going to be done," returned Bray, thoughtfully. "A big majority of folks here would rather see a show any day than hear a preaching."

"The work of the devil, brother, the work of the devil! We have got to fight him at every step, and fight him hard. We must break up this intended show if we can do it. That's what we are here for."

"I agree with you; but we shall have to go slow. I haven't a doubt but that the best of my congregation had rather see this show than hear me preach, any time, and we must win them, Brother Joy, win them. When you can't drive, then you must coax, you see."

"Well, yes, there is something in that. But, let's see what the poster has to say of their unholy performance."

The placard had been affixed to the bulletin, and the clerk now stepping away the two parsons arose and went soberly over to read it.

No need to quote it. What it had to say was plain, straightforward and to the point. It announced that the sisters would give a concert on the following evening in the hall of the Big Horn Saloon.

In particular, it set forth the nature of the performance, telling the parts each of the women would assume. And in conclusion it wound up with the statement that the performance was strictly moral, and was approved alike by press and clergy wherever it had been given.

Upon reading that, the two divines looked at each other.

"We are floored," spoke Joy.

"We are downed—dumped," agreed Bray.

"What are we going to do about it, Brother Bray?"

"I see but one way out of it, Brother Joy."

"And what is that?"

"Compromise."

"A compromise with sin—with the devil? Never!"

"But, see the banner they float—'Approved by the clergy.' How are we going to get around that?"

"A device of the devil! But, how would you compromise? What can we do that will not work the wrong way and compromise us?"

"We must attend the show, that is the way, and see it for ourselves. This notice—'Approved by the clergy,' will be our excuse. Then we shall be in a position to open our mouths knowingly concerning it. What do you say to it?"

"I suppose I may safely trust your judgment."

"Why, yes, I think you may. We will show ourselves friendly to the people, you see, and enter into their enjoyments, as far as proper for us to do; then they will have no excuse for not

meeting us half-way when we hold our meeting. We must have the crowd then, you know."

"Certainly, certainly. Without the crowd we can do no good. We will attend the show, brother, and see and hear with our own eyes and ears. But, what is this other notice—this offer of reward?"

"That? Why, that's the reward offered for Devil Duval. Haven't you heard of him?"

"You know I am a new arrival in these parts, dear brother."

"So you are. Well, this Devil Duval is the most notorious outlaw this part of the country ever knew. His record is black with heinous crimes, and a price is upon his head, as you see. What is more, it is feared that he is in this neighborhood."

"You terrify me! But, now I recollect the meeting that was being held when I arrived this afternoon, and here I see a copy of the resolutions passed. It is hardly likely that the rascal will dare to venture here, I should think. But, is it known that he is at the head of the Invisible Seven you told me about?"

"Well, no, it isn't known to be so; but there can hardly be any doubt about it. It is in perfect keeping with all his other doings, so far as we know anything about him, and his name is a household word, the mention of which is enough to scare timid women into fits. Oh, the man is a demon, if ever there was one in the flesh, and between you and me I am afraid he would pay little attention to this notice if he wanted to come here. But, let's resume our seats."

So they did, continuing their talk, and spent an hour there. At the end of that time they returned to the domicile of the Rev. Bray.

CHAPTER VII.

NIP-'N'-TUCK IS SHOCKED.

WHEN morning dawned a surprise awaited Nip-'n'-Tuck.

It was Goody Crawl, proprietor of the Big Horn Saloon, who first discovered the cause.

In the saloon was a bulletin-board, the same as in the hotel across the way, and on it were posters similar to those on the other. These boards were a feature of the town.

Goody Crawl made use of the one in his place to announce any special brand of bottled enthusiasm he happened to want to make a leader of on any particular day to get rid of stale stock, and stepped to the board on this morning to make some alteration, when he made the discovery.

And it was a discovery that was likely to startle him not a little, too.

The newest poster on the board was the written copy of the set of resolutions that had been passed on the previous day, and when Goody stepped to the board, something on the bottom of that placard, in heavy pencil, drew his attention.

Taking a second look, this was what he read:

Defiance to all! DEVIL DUVAL.

Several persons were in the room at the time, and all heard Goody's ejaculation of surprise and saw him take a step back from the board.

"Hello! what is the matter, Goody?" inquired George Pierre, who happened to be the nearest to him.

"Look there and see for yourself, Gold-plate," Goody responded, pointing.

George Pierre was a gentleman gambler—rather professional gambler, and was familiarly known as Gold-plate George.

He stepped forward, only to utter an exclamation, which brought every person in the room to the spot, eager to know what it meant.

"What the deuce have you fellows found?" demanded Baldwin Bloome.

This individual was a horse-dealer, and had an interest in the big hotel besides. He was called "Baldy" for short, and as he was bald, in fact, the nickname was quite appropriate.

"Devil Duval has been here," announced Gold-plate.

"Man, you're crazy!"

"Oh, but he has," assured Crawl. "Here is his name. He bids defiance to us."

"But, when and how did he put his name there?"

"That's what gets me. I don't know. It wasn't while the saloon was open, that I'll swear; and I don't see how he got in after it was closed."

"It is a mystery," mused Gold-plate George. "There was something in that tale poor Jerky told, after all."

"Yes; and I begin to believe that it wasn't so much natural death with him as the doctor thinks, either," added Baldy Bloome. "This Devil Duval is a holy terror, if everything is true they say of him."

"Well, something has got to be done, that's sure," cried Goody. "Where's the doctor? We can't put up tamely with this sort of thing. We'll have to set Marshal Slow at the task of finding this knave out, and bringing him to account. We can't take this and not kick."

The crowd looked on and listened with approving minds.

"But, thunder! look here, too!" suddenly cried Gold-plate.

"What now?" demanded Baldy.

The gambler was pointing to the poster offering reward for the outlaw.

On the bottom of that, in pencil writing, was something which they all read with eagerness. It was this:

"And I'll give \$1,000 more to the man who takes me."
DEVIL DUVAL.

"The infernal cheek, daring and impudence of the cuss!" cried Goody Crawl, in hot rage. "I'd like to be the man to pull the rope that hangs him!"

"And here, too!" echoed Baldy Bloome. "Come, let's go across to the United States and see if he has been there. It strikes me as probable that he has, for he has nerve enough."

This motion needed no seconding, for a rush was made for the door immediately, and every man of them went over to the hotel bar-room.

When they entered it was a great surprise to all present, and Doctor Conrad, who happened to be there, quickly inquired the cause of all the excitement.

Without stopping to respond, all of them crossed the floor to the bulletin-board.

Here the same notices greeted their astonished eyes, and they immediately made known their discovery.

Needless to say the excitement ran high then, and men hastened to other places where the posters had been put, to see if it was the same with all. And they found it was.

At the Peach Blow, at the stores and post-office, at the different saloons; everywhere the additions had been penciled, and the name of Devil Duval was on every lip.

Nothing like this had ever happened at Nip-n-Tuck.

But the worst was not yet.

About the time when the excitement was at its height, Sinclair Fowley came rushing into the United States, pale and nervous, and dropped upon a chair as though about to collapse altogether.

Sinclair Fowley was one of the largest owners in the big hotel, and was also manager of the Kobinoor Gold Mine, the best of the mines at Nip-n-Tuck. He was a man of much importance, and one whose expressed wish or opinion always had weight.

He had now come direct from the office of the mine, and was not yet aware of what had been discovered, but he had been in the bar-room but a second or two when he saw that something unusual was in the wind. All eyes were upon him, and Doctor Conrad quickly asked:

"What in the world is it, Fowley? Have you discovered it, too?"

"I might ask you what is the excitement here," was the response. "I have discovered something, yes."

"That Devil Duval has been around—"

"Devil Duval! Then it was he that robbed the mine last night—"

"Robbed the mine?"

"Yes; and of every ounce of bullion there was on hand."

"Great Scott! And the rascal openly defies us, and even adds another thousand to the reward that is offered for him!"

"What! What's that you say? What are you all talking about, anyhow? Explain what you mean!" And the mine-manager, already upon his feet, stamped around wildly.

He was told what had been discovered, and if ever a man was enraged, he was the man. He stormed around furiously, and his vehement denunciations soon had everybody at white heat against the outlaw.

The news spread like wildfire, and in a very short time nearly the whole town was congregated on the Square in front of the leading hotel and the Big Horn.

"A meeting must be called, that's what must be done," declared Doctor Conrad, loudly.

"Where's the marshal?"

"Hyar's ther marshal," sung out Ham Stanton, and he and Simon Slow were seen working their way through the crowd to the front. "Push right through thar, Simon, an' git to yer post."

Mr. Slow was not very slow in doing that, and as soon as he had mounted to the platform

of justice, he held up his hands to enjoin silence.

The hum abated, and when he could make himself heard, the marshal said:

"Citizens of Nip-n-Tuck, we are hyar to discuss a 'portant question. We has been defied to our teeth by this hyar cuss, Devil Duval, an' we don't mean ter take it."

"You bet!" "Not ary time!" A hundred such cries interrupted for a few moments.

"What are wass," the marshal went on, "the Kobinoor hev been robbed, an' all ther bullion toted off. It must be ther work of Devil Duval an' his Invisible Seven!"

"Ther Invisible Seven! That's them! Death to Duval an' his Seven!"

"We want to make this a regular indignation meeting, Marshal Slow," spoke up Doctor Conrad. "We want to take some decided action in the matter. Something must be done to recover this stolen bullion, if possible."

"Yes; and to catch and punish the infernal thief!" cried Fowley, in hot rage. "Marshal, it is for you to take this thing in hand, and sift it out. That is what you are marshal for. Are you going to allow your town to be dealt with in this fashion?"

"That is the question," added Doctor Conrad. "What are you going to do about it, Marshal Slow? We, the citizens, to a man, are ready to do your bidding in any direction that promises success. What have you to propose? Come, you are Slow by name, but it will not do for you to be slow by nature, too, at a time like this. Let us hear what you have to say, and we're ready to back you."

"Give ther man a chance, boys, give him a chance," cried Ham Stanton. "He is a little slow by natur', as you have all declared, an' you must allow for him."

"Citizens, mebbly I be somewhat slow," drawled the marshal, "but you will have ter admit that I have a way of gettin' thar jest ther same. I was goin' ter propose that ther doctor thar take ther cheer, but it seems ter me that I am marshal an' I guess I will undertake ter hold it down myself. Now we is hyar to see what is goin' ter be done about this hyar thing. What is yer say?"

Ham Stanton had the floor instantly, and everybody knew it would be a useless waste of time to oppose him.

"Marshal an' feller-cits," he spoke; "this hyar are somethin' that can't be passed over lightly. We has got ter do suthin', though I don't 'zactly see what it is goin' ter be. We must hunt out this hyar thief an' murderer, as Devil Duval is, an' let him know that he can't rule things with a high hand hyar."

"I agree with you in that, perfectly, sir," declared Doctor Conrad. "We must have the fellow, at any cost, and break up his band. It is only too plain now that poor Jerky Jake told us the truth, and it is possible that I was mistaken about the manner of his death. Maybe he was murdered, in some subtle way. If Devil Duval is in this camp, fellow-citizens, we want to find him."

"That is the talk!" cried the mine-manager. "If the fellow and his band are in this town, or anywhere around, we want to know it, and who they are. We harbor no villains here, knowingly, and we want them to understand it. But, most important of all, is to recover this lost treasure, if possible. It will stand as a lasting disgrace for our village in the sight of the world if we allow them to get away with that."

"Christian friends, may I be allowed to make a suggestion?"

All eyes instantly turned in the direction of the voice, to discover the Rev. Day Lancelot Joy leaning upon the arm of his "brother," the Rev. Bray.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOME SURPRISES SPRUNG.

THE meek-looking and sleek Mr. Joy had one hand up, as if claiming the floor as his right.

Marshal Slow, who was anything but a model chairman, as must be confessed, was a little slow to respond, as though he did not know whether to give the right or not.

"Why, certainly," spoke up Doctor Conrad; "the marshal will give you a chance to make any suggestion you desire. Isn't that about right, eh, marshal? If the reverend gentleman can show us any way out of this dilemma, let's hear him by all means."

"Why, sartainly," agreed Slow, slowly. "Speak right up in meetin', Mister Sky-pilot, an' give us ther best ye kin offer. We is at our wits' end ter know how ter deal wi' this hyar case, I allow, an' if you kin help us out you will be doin' us a big sarvice. Speak right out, sir."

"Thank you," said Mr. Joy. "I have been

listening to all that has been said, people of Nip-n-Tuck, and have gained some knowledge of the situation. It would appear that these outlaws are in your midst, somewhere, or one or more of them at any rate. Perhaps their chief is even now within sound of my voice. If so, you know your own flock, and you must look after the strangers."

"Ha!" ejaculated the Rev. Bray. "I see your point, Brother Joy. You would separate the sheep from the goats, as it were, and then sift the goats to find the one particular scapegoat."

"Exactly, Brother Bray, exactly."

"That's a fu'st rate idee," agreed Marshal Slow. "I don't see nothin' out of ther way wi' that."

"And of course ther reverent gentleman don't forget, while he's talkin', that he are a stranger hyar himself," spoke up Ham Stanton.

The reverend gentleman smiled serenely.

"Really," he said, "that thought never occurred to me till you mentioned it, dear sir, and I'm obliged to you. I will offer myself freely as the first to be examined."

"There is no need of that," spoke the Rev. Bray. "Your action in the matter is enough, even were you not of the cloth with myself. But, citizens and good friends, I think this suggestion a most excellent one, and would suggest that it be acted on without delay."

"It strikes me as being just the thing," assented Sinclair Fowley. "Something has got to be done, and that as soon as possible. If that bullion can be recovered, I want it."

"And if that terrible outlaw can be apprehended," added Bray, "we must make sure of him."

"Marshal," spoke up Doctor Conrad, "I move that all strangers in the town be at once arrested and brought here for examination."

"And I second the motion," cried Goody Crawl. "If anything crooked can be found about any of them, we may get the right clew to the chief of the knaves, if nothing more."

"Put ther motion, marshal, put ther motion," cried Ham Stanton, to prompt his successful candidate of the last campaign.

"It are motioned and put," drawled the chairman, "that all strangers in this hyar camp—"

"Village," corrected Doctor Conrad, interrupting.

"In this hyar village, then," Mr. Slow accepted; "be put under arrest and brought hyar for trial. Now, all as is in favor of this hyar proceedin', jest say so."

The general shout of approval that followed showed that the motion had carried.

"That settles it, marshal!" cried Doctor Conrad. "The motion is a law, and you are the man to carry it out. Appoint your deputies and go for your men."

"There ain't many strangers in town, far as I know," remarked Crawl. "There was that Italian organ-grinder that came by the stage last night, and the English duke, or whatever he was."

"And ther two wimmin," reminded Ham Stanton.

"Yes, the two women," accepted Sinclair Fowley. "But, then, it ain't to be supposed that wimmin had anything ter do with it. We'll look after the men first."

"And yer won't have ter look fur," fer they is right hyar!"

This was true. The Italian was on the outer edge of the crowd, with his organ and monkey on his shoulders, ready for the business of the day, while the Englishman, if such he was, was on the steps of the piazza, looking inquisitively on.

"Some of ye lay hands on them two fellers," directed Marshal Slow, "an' bring 'em hyar afore me. An' some more of ye go an' take up what other strangers is ter be found around."

These directions were speedily carried out.

Several men laid hold upon the Italian, much to his evident alarm, while others did the same with Donald McGregor Tiff, and they were hurriedly brought forward.

"Hi want to know phat his the meaning hof this," demanded Mr. Tiff. "Hi ham outraged by hany such proceedin's, gentlemen. Hi demand to know phwat hit means, hand hat once, too. Phwy ham Hi taken ha prisoner?"

He was excited, and it seemed terribly difficult for him to get over the "H" when it fell in his way.

And the Italian, too, he was jabbering away at a great rate at the same time, gesticulating wildly to give force to his protestations.

"Mea no káda man!" he vociferated—"mea no bada man; alla da same da monk. Mea no tella da lie, no steal-a, noa fight. Mea all da time gooda Dago; alla da same da monk too."

Why for da 'Mericano takka mea dissa way? Mea gooda Giuliano Huppazuli; no bada Dago." "Shut up both of ye!" ordered the marshal. "We'll see what you are, in about one minute. If you're all right, no harm done; but if ye ain't—look out."

The Italian had been dragged forward in advance of the other prisoner, and came in for examination first.

"Don'ta hurta da monk!" he cried, in great alarm, as his box and money were taken from him; "don'ta hurta da monk!"

"Never mind yer munk," said Ham Stanton, who was one of the searchers; "he won't git hurt, I guess. Take it easy, now, Italy, an' we'll soon go through ye."

But "Jooly Hoopdooly," as he was now called, could not take it easy. He had to jabber away as fast as he could wag his tongue, though he offered no resistance against being searched.

He was searched and examined pretty thoroughly, but nothing was found on him that could be taken as proof that he was other than he seemed.

Rev. Day Lancelot Joy stood looking on, still arm in arm with Rev. Bray, and in fact everybody was paying the closest attention. But, as said, nothing was found that could be used against the "grinder."

"Reckon we'll have ter let this one go, marshal," spoke Ham Stanton, when he had finished the search. "Thar's nothin' about him that ain't ther real thing, fur as I kin see."

"All right, let him go, then," Doctor Conrad proposed. "He's the very last one we could reasonably suspect, anyhow."

"That's what I think!" agreed the marshal. "You is free, Italy, so take up yer box and yer munk, and git. Thank yer stars that ye got off so easy."

The Italian was not slow in getting back to the outer circle of the crowd, while attention was being turned to Donald McGregor Tiff. Against him there was more of real suspicion.

In his hands he held his blanket, still rolled in its peculiar way, something remarkable, now that attention was called to it. That was now taken away from him and laid on the edge of the platform just behind him. He was then made the victim of a thorough search.

"Hi 'ope ye will l'ave me skin hon," he finally mildly protested, in his forced way.

At that same instant, almost, one of the searchers uttered an exclamation, and with a quick jerk tore the red whiskers and beard from the man's face, leaving himself exposed as a different person altogether from what he had seemed!

There was one great exclamation of surprise from the whole crowd at once, at this revelation, but before any other action could be taken against him, the exposed masquerader had taken action for himself.

With two quick motions, one to the right and the other to the left, with his arms, he sent his captors staggering back, and in the same instant sprung to the platform.

And there, with movements so rapid that no one offered to interfere, but rather looked on in the surprise of curiosity, he snatched up his rolled blanket.

A jerk at the string that bound it, another jerk that rolled it open, and out came an old musket of wonderful size, which was snatched up before it had more than appeared, and putting it to his shoulder and covering the crowd the man stepped back a step on the platform exclaiming:

"Begorra, but dhis has gone about far enough, Oi am t'inkin'!"

CHAPTER IX.

DISCUSSING THE SITUATION.

His action had occupied little more than two seconds of time, at most, and it had all taken place so quickly that no one had thought of interfering.

But now, when it was realized that they had allowed him to get the "drop," a general howl went up. Surely, this must be Duval, the Outlaw! Who else could have any object in coming there so disguised?

"It's Devil Duval!" was the cry.

"Down with ther cuss!"

"String him!"

"Hould yer whist fur jest wan minute," the man with the big gun requested. "Sure, it is mesel' dhat can set ye roight on a p'int or two, Oi am t'inkin', begob."

"Who the dickens are you?" demanded Doctor Conrad.

"Who should Oi be but mesel'?" was the lucid response.

"Are you Devil Duval?" cried George Pierre, in whose hand a revolver gleamed.

"Divil a wan av me is," was the prompt reply.

"Then who are you?"

"Sure it is mesel' dhat is Barney O'Linn, dhe thrump card av me masther, Dandy Dick; and dhe which same is dhe worst innemy Devil Duval ever bad."

"What! Are you the Irish pard of Dandy Dick Duval, the man who has been hunting Devil Duval like a bloodhound?"

"Dhat same Oi am," Barney assured.

"And what was you doing here in disguise?"

"Sure, it is huntin' fur our innemy we are. But, bad luck to ye all, it is afther spoilin' our game ye are, so ye are."

"Is Dandy Dick Darrel here?" asked Fowley.

"Never a bit av him, yet," Barney answered.

"Sure, it is mesel' dhat is dhe advance guard, as it were."

"And where is Dick?"

"How should Oi know?"

"Wasn't he coming here to work with you against your enemy?"

"Dhat same he was; but sure it is not comin' here now he'll be a-doin', no more he will, afther dhe cat is out av dhe bag, as it is. Sure, an he did, dhe outlaw could pop him over and not half thry."

"Well, put up your gun," advised Baldy Bloome. "If you're what you claim, we've got nothing against you."

"Hould on, dhere! Ka'pe off!" Barney warned, squinting along the barrel of his formidable weapon. "Sure, an ye make a move dhis way, it is a shower av buckshot ye will hear, so ye will. Be aisy, now!"

"But, we don't mean you any harm," assured Doctor Conrad.

"Will ye allow me at liberty?" Barney asked.

"Yes, of course," was the general response to that.

"And ye won't be afther thryin' to fool me, av Oi lower me gun?"

"No, no! We have heard of you, Barney. Put up your gun and it will be all right. We want to talk with you."

It did not seem that there could be room to doubt the story the young Irishman told. In any event, it was certain that he was not Devil Duval, now that the crowd had had time to think it over.

"Sure, it is no intintion Oi have av murtherin' any av ye," declared Barney, "but whin ye had taken off me hair and me whiskers, begorra Oi thought it was boigh time to protest before ye took off me skin as well. An ye promise me Oi am free, Oi will put away me musketoon."

"You are free, of course," assured Doctor Conrad. "We have no excuse for holding you any longer; eh, marshal?"

"Not ez I kin see," assented Mr. Slow. "Thar don't seem ter be any proof that ther feller is Devil Duval. On ther other hand, he seems ter be jest what he claims, an' we has heard of him."

"That's ther stuff, Simon!" complimented Ham Stanton. "I am proud of ye, an' ye are a credit to ther office ye hold. Ther man ain't Devil Duval no more nor I am, that's plain, an' we has no right to hold him as sich. It's too bad that we has gone an' sp'iled ther game of Dandy Dick."

"Ye are shoutin' when ye say dhat same!" cried Barney, he having now lowered his big musket. "Sure, ye have exposed me to dhe murtherin' designs av me innemy, and ye have made it impossible fur me master to come here and thry another hack at him. It is a bad bit av business fur us, all around, begorra. But, dhere is no use weepin' over it, Oi suppose."

"May I be allowed to make one more little suggestion?" asked the Rev. Joy, in modest tone. "Sartainly, sartainly," quickly assured Ham Stanton.

"Yes, ter be sure," echoed the marshal.

"It is merely a thought yu seem to have overlooked. If this man is Barney O'Linn, a man who has seen the outlaw face to face, it seems to me he would be a good man for you to keep here. He ought to be able to detect the outlaw at sight, should he appear."

"A mighty good suggestion," cried Goody Crawl.

"Will you stay with us, Mr. O'Linn?" asked Doctor Conrad.

"Begorra, Oi shall have to stay, till Oi can hear from me masther to get furdher instructions, now dhat Oi shall have to give him dhe warnin' not to appear here," was Barney's response.

"Good enough. And it seems to me that it would be well for you to tell your master, as you

call him, to come on here, in disguise, and that this whole town stands ready to help him in his hunt for his enemy. It is a case in which we could all work together with good results."

"That are the way it looks ter me, too," coincided Ham Stanton.

"Oi can tell him dhat," but, phwether he will agree to it or not, I dunno."

By this time several other prisoners had been brought to the scene, all of them strangers in the place, and Barney was called on to say whether any of them was the outlaw or not.

There were four of them, and the young Irishman gave them a thorough inspection before he ventured upon a decision.

"No," he finally declared, "a divil a wan av dhem is dhat murtherin' villain, an' dhat Oi can swear to."

"But that does not assure us that they are not his men," quickly spoke up Doctor Conrad. "Let us have them searched."

"Yas," directed the marshal, "s'arch 'em, an' if ther is anything found on 'em that is suspicious, we will hold them. This hyar thing is serious, an' we must let 'em know we mean biz."

"That's ther talk, right hot from ther shovel," cried Ham Stanton, proud of the showing the marshal was making.

Accordingly the prisoners were searched, thoroughly, but nothing was found on them.

They were allowed to go, and the mystery was even deeper than before.

"By the way, O'Linn," remarked Doctor Conrad, "this master of yours is something of a detective, isn't he?"

"Begorra, but divil a foiner ever lived nor phwat he is," Barney proudly asserted.

"And you say it was his intention to come here?"

"It was dhat same."

"Then it is pretty certain he will come, anyhow, I should say, considering the kind of man he is said to be."

"Oi dunno. Av he does, it will be on dhe sly, you bet; fur divil a bit av him would Devil Duval l'ave aloive, ef he got a crack at him."

"Well, what I was coming at is this: If he comes here, you just tell him all about this case, and ask him to make himself known to us. We want his help, and we will all work together. See?"

"Begorra, Oi do see. Av he comes here, and makes himsel' known to me, Oi will put him up to dhe divilmint dhat has been goin' on."

"But, didn't you say you had to notify him of your failure?" questioned the Rev. Joy.

"Oi did dhat, sor," answered Barney, "but divil only knows phwat dhe next move will be. Oi am as much at say as dhe rest av yez are."

"Well," Fowley here put in, "this meeting seems to have accomplished mighty little for itself. We don't know any more than we did before, except that Devil Duval is certainly here, or has been."

"That is plain as day," declared Doctor Conrad. "He has put his name all over the town, for one thing, and the robbery of the mine is further proof. No one but Duval could have done that. And then, too, here is the fact that this Irishman and his master were spotting the fellow here."

"Hould on, right thar," suddenly spoke up the marshal. "Irishman, how did you know this outlaw was around here?"

"That's ther way!" cried Ham Stanton. "You is ther man fer ther office, old man, an' yer is provin' it every day."

"Begorra," answered Barney, "but phwy wouldn't we know somethin' about dhe movements av dhe arch knave? Sure, me masther has been afther him noight an' day, an' never a minute does he let up. He knowed well dhat he was aimin' dhis way."

"That explains ther p'int. Feller-galoots, it seems ter me that this hyar man Darrel are jest ther one we wants to git holt of for this hyar biz, an' it seems ter me that ther way to do it are ter have this Irisher notify him of our want in ther matter. What do yer say?"

"That is it, exactly!" exclaimed Baldy Bloome.

The others immediately agreed, and as that seemed to end the business of the meeting, it was adjourned, and men fell to talking in groups. There was no thought of work at Nip-n-Tuck that morning.

CHAPTER X.

YANG KEE THE CHINAMAN.

GRADUALLY the keen edge of the excitement wore off, as it always will, and other things could be thought of and talked of.

This was not so at the office of the robbed mine, however, where the loss of some fourteen thousand dollars' worth of bullion was no trifling matter.

There Sinclair Fowley was pacing up and down the floor, taking on like a madman over the loss. His underlings kept well out of his way, for he was in no mood to be spoken to.

Occasionally he would break out with an oath, though he was not given to swearing as a usual thing, and perhaps would kick a chair spinning across the room out of his way. He could not control himself at all, it seemed, and little wonder.

"Demmet!" he presently cried, stopping at the desk of the bookkeeper and giving it a blow with his fist that made the bookkeeper jump clear from his stool, at the same time stamping his feet with a force that made the windows jingle. "Demmet! I will have the rascal, if it costs every dollar I'm worth! Smith, take up your pen and write out a notice of reward."

The bookkeeper made haste to comply, and the manager dictated an offer of an additional thousand dollars reward for the arrest of Devil Duval.

"There!" Fowley cried, when it was done. "We'll see what *that* will do! Make several copies of it, Smith, and have them posted. Demmet! the fellow must not get off free with that bullion!"

Jamming his hat down on his head with force, the manager went off in the direction of the hotel, slamming the office door as he went out, and the men in the office drew their first full and free breath for an hour or more, and fell to discussing the situation.

As said, the excitement was slower in abating at the mine office than elsewhere about the town.

"Jooly Hoopdooly" was now going the rounds of the village, grinding out airs his barrel organ could render, and amusing the people with the antics of his monkey, Nicolo.

If there had been a suspicion in the minds of any that he was other than he seemed, there was no ground for that suspicion. He seemed to have not the least interest in the events of the hour, but went about as though nothing had happened, happy in his idle work and in the enjoyment of "da monk."

The children of the village followed him around wherever he went, enjoying a treat none of them had ever heard of. Some of them—most of them, in fact, born there in that little valley, had never been beyond the hills which surrounded it, and knew nothing of the world outside.

To them all the Italian was kind and attentive, seeming to enjoy their company fully as much as they enjoyed the music and the monkey. And if at first any of the mothers of the youngsters had looked upon him with suspicious eyes, he had redeemed himself nobly in their sight.

Some time late in the afternoon, when the organist was down at the lower end of the village, playing away as ever, with the monkey dancing about on the box, an interesting incident took place.

There was a low saloon in that neighborhood, where most of the roughs and toughs of the place usually spent their idle hours, and this being something of an impromptu holiday, the saloon was well filled, and a good many were much the worse for the vile stuff they had been imbibing.

In its cosmopolitan population, Nip'n-Tuck had one lone Chinaman.

This was a fellow named Yang Kee, who was in the employ of Doctor Conrad as a sort of handy man in general. He cooked, washed, ironed, cared for the house and office—the doctor was a bachelor; and made himself useful in numerous ways. He was a servant the doctor prized not a little.

But, much as he prized him, it was not the doctor's policy to let Yang Kee know his worth. Perhaps he had a fear that Yang Kee would become vain, or might demand higher wages, and possibly the doctor was right; but there was another side to the question. Yang Kee, serve his master well as he could—and more than once he had done desperate things for him, had found that it was all taken as a matter of course, and his fervor was flagging and he was growing a little remiss in his duties.

On this forenoon, when the Italian was drawing near to the saloon with his organ, the Chinaman was coming up the valley toward the village, having been out upon some errand or other for the medicine-man.

In front of the saloon was quite a crowd, with some of the worst characters of the village in it. Some of these had been calling to the Italian

to come over there, but he had been hanging back, suiting his pace to the demand of the people for music—according to his estimation of that demand.

He had passed the last house, however, and the saloon was next in order. He approached it a little behind the Chinaman, who was going right on about his business, when one rough fellow in the crowd proposed that they have him dance to the tune of the Italian's music.

Such a proposition was hailed with delight, and half a dozen men stepped out in front of the Chinaman and stopped him.

The Celestial protested, but it was of no use, and rough hands were laid upon him.

In another moment the Italian was at hand.

"Now, then, grind 'er up, Hoozley Goozley, or whatever yer name are," one fellow sung out. "We're goin' ter have a Chinese dance hyar, you bet!"

"No makee me dance," protested the Chinaman, struggling to get free. "Yang Kee got to go gettee dinner for Doc. Allee samee gottee no time to dance. You lettee me go!"

Yang Kee had fair command of English—that is to say, he could string his words together so as to make his meaning plain enough to answer all purposes, though he had the peculiar "Chinese" dialect withal.

"Nary a let go," was the retort, with a coarse laugh. "You has got ter dance, you bet, or we'll hang ye. Come, Italy, strike up a tune and we'll make ther heathen hoe it down fine."

"Mea playa da gooda one," the Italian promised, as he adjusted his box. "Mea playa da nice-a tune, Chinaman dance; da monk dance too. Have biga time all da same."

"That's the talk! Grind her out, now, an' ther Chinese will go at it."

"Me no gottee time," the Celestial still protested. "Doc wantee his dinner; me allee samee gittee kickee all over house; you lettee me go, tellee you!"

"It makes no diff what you tellee us," cried the leader of the tough crowd, a big, burly fellow, half filled with bad drink; "we tells yer to dance, and dance yer has got to, or die! Play up, Italy, play up!"

The Italian began to turn, and a lively Irish jig and reel was ground out in a disjointed fashion.

"Now, heathen, dance!" was the order.

But, the Chinaman evidently had made up his mind not to dance.

"No; me no dance!" he cried. "You lettee me go, quick! Doctor comee, him kickee me full holes. Lettee Yang Kee go!"

"You dance, an' then we'll let ye go," he was promised.

"Alla da same Chinaman better dance," put in the Italian. "Chinaman dance, him be letta go; noa dance, noa be letta go. 'Melicano mans noa wanta hang Chinaman."

"'Melican man heap big liar!" cried the Chinaman. "Him tellee lettee me go, me dance; me dance, no lettee go, allee samee keepee me here all day, makee me dance more. Me no dance anyhow. Lettee me go, big gallootee!"

"What's that yer say!" cried the big ruffian, giving the Chinaman a jerk around that almost took him off his feet. "Yer call me a big galoot! By ther gosh but I've a notion ter bust yer nose fer ye! Now you dance, an' dance hard, or I'll jam this hyar knife inter yer gizzard!"

He had drawn a knife, and held it threateningly near.

Still the Chinaman was obstinate, and refused to do as he was ordered. And now he struggled in a way that made it necessary for two or three to hold him.

The Italian was grinding away, and the monkey on the box was dancing around in its monkey fashion, but the Chinese refused to take his part in the merry sport, and seemed fully determined.

"You killee me, no makee me dance, sure," the Celestial reasoned. "Me no dance anyhow; better lettee me go."

"Yas yer will dance, too!" roared the big ruffian. "If yer won't dance as we wants yer too, we'll give ye a dance on nothin'! Boyees, fetch a rope fer ther heathen cuss."

"Yang Kee no scare," retorted the Chinaman, coolly. "Me allee samee gottee biler full 'Melican sand; no makee me dance, you bet!"

"Then we'll hang yer, by ther gosh."

"Me no care; me no dance."

The Italian seemed to be looking upon the Chinaman with something of admiration. That he had "sand" was plain enough.

"Come, yaller, it's dance or hang!" the big fellow urged. "Ther music is a-goin', and all

yer h-s got ter do is ter step in an' wind it off. We don't keer nothin' erbout ther doctor's dinner; we wants a dance."

It was of no use; the Chinaman was like a balky mule, and there was no pushing him.

"We'll show yer, then, blast yer!" the big fellow cried. "Git hyar with that rope, fellers, an' if we don't wipe out ther Chinese popperlation hyar you kin kick me, that's all."

A rope was being brought, and it was speedily in place around the Chinaman's neck, and the angry crowd was about to pull him away, perhaps with the intention of really hanging him, when he received assistance from an unexpected quarter. It was from no one else than the Italian, who now came to the rescue.

CHAPTER XI.

BARNEY O'LINN TO THE FORE.

THE music had stopped, and those who had hold upon the rope suddenly felt it let loose somehow.

The Italian had drawn an ugly knife and cut the rope, setting the Chinese free, and in the same instant he had pulled Yang out of the grasp of the big ruffian, and now told him to run.

"You-a runna!" he whispered. "Mea coola da heated brow ofa deesa 'Melicano. You-a runna like-a funna!"

But the Chinaman was not running just then. All he had wanted was the use of his hands, and he could then take care of himself, as he proved.

His capture had been by surprise. Had he been expecting anything of the sort, what followed made it plain that it would not have happened at all.

With a bound he was behind the Italian and his box, and there he suddenly confronted his foes with a brace of revolvers in his fists.

It had all taken place in so short a time that it was a complete surprise to the whole crowd.

"Yang Kee nixee run!" the Celestial cried. "Allee samee no dance, no runnee, you bettee! 'Melican man dance, else gittee shoot full holes!"

The tables were turned.

"Who cut that rope?" thundered the leader of the angry mob.

"Mea cutta da rope," the Italian admitted.

"What did yer do it fur, blast ye? I've a notion ter hang you, now!"

"Better not try him on," warned the Chinaman, squinting along the tubes of his weapons. "Yang Kee shoot, shootee hard!"

"Mea no wanta seea da Chinaman getta hanga," the Italian made response to the demand. "Mekka da monk sick—mea too. Mea da cause ofa da Chinaman him getta why in da trouble; mea helpa him outa da trouble, alla da same."

"Blast ye fer a pair of furriners, anyhow! Put up them 'ar weepins, Chinese, or it will be ther worse fer ye."

"Be allee samee worse for *you*, you don't dance," was the rejoinder.

"By ther gosh! Yer don't mean ter make *me* dance, do yer?"

"You bettee," was the decided retort.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Turn upee crank," the Chinaman directed the Italian. "'Melican man dance or die, me no care which. Must do it blamee quick; me gottee go gittee dinner."

With a grin the Italian seized the crank, having placed his knife in his mouth to have it handy—as it looked, and the lively air was turned loose again upon the ears of the throng.

"Come, now, you dancee!" cried the Chinaman, bringing both weapons to bear upon the big fellow. "You dancee quick, else gittee lead pill in belly, makee you sick, you bettee!"

The overgrown ruffian paled, half-drunk as he was.

"Yer wouldn't shoot a feller?" he gasped.

"Shootee quick!" was the forcible response, in true Chinese style. "You dancee!"

There was that about the Celestial that seemed to impress the crowd that he meant it—certainly he did look "shoot," and immediately the big rascal began to dance, to the delight of all.

This turn of affairs brought good will all around, except in the breast of the dancer himself.

Even those who had been with him for making the Celestial dance, now laughed heartily at his expense, as he went into the effort with a will, with the revolvers of the Chinaman still covering him.

For a period of two minutes he was obliged to keep it up, and only stopped then when the Italian ceased to furnish the music.

"How you likee him?" asked the Celestial with a grin. "Maybe you foollee no more with

Yang Kee. Me no tenderfoot; me cuttee eye-teeth long time 'go. Next time don't be so freshee. Sabe?"

"We'll kill yer, that's what we'll do!" stormed the panting ruffian. "You had ther drop that 'ar time, but yer—"

"Dhere, dhere, now, don't be affther spoilin' av dhe shport wid a quarrel," suddenly put in a strong Irish voice, and Barney O'Linn was seen making his way to the front, his big musket in hand. "Sure, an' ye will 'lave it dhrop, it is givin' ye a dance mesel' Oi'll be doin'."

He and his big musket were inseparable.

With such a villain as Devil Duval to be looking out for, he could not afford to take any chances, he said.

His coming drew all attention to himself, and the Chinaman was given a moment of respite. It was one that he took advantage of.

"You-a runna now," whispered the Italian. "Now you-a hava da gooda chance."

"Yes; me gittee," responded Yang Kee. "Me make him dancee, now me go gittee dinner for doctor. You lookkee outee! You done Yang Kee goodee turn; maybe Yang Kee find chance pay back. Sabe?"

And with that the Celestial was off, and when they thought to look for him he was out of sight.

Meanwhile response had been made to the happy young Irishman.

"Who ther blazes be you?" cried the big dancer. "Oh, you're ther galoot what kem hyar rigged out as an Englisher. No knowin' what you be, fer I don't take a heap of stock in what you tell."

"Well, sure, don't 'lave us quarrel about it," cried Barney, smiling broadly. "Sure, dhe joke worked dhe wrong way, so it did, and dhe man dhat can't take a joke is a poor sort av a stick, anyhow, says Oi."

"You are mighty free with yer tongue."

"And Oi'm jest as free wid me feet, too," Barney assured. And he gave them a little flirt around to prove it.

"Let ther Irisher dance, let him dance," was the call.

"Not till I'm done with this hyar Chine—"

So the big fellow started to say, and as he spoke he looked for Yang who, as stated, was out of sight.

It was just as well, and better, perhaps, for the situation had been entirely in the Chinaman's favor, and just how the big fellow would have got "done" with him did not appear.

"Whar is that cuss?" he roared.

"Mea seea him slippa out and runna like-a da olda nikka," the Italian made answer.

"Ther dickins he di! Wal, it's a blessed good thing fer him that he did, for I was goin' ter pulverize him, you bet! I'll 'tend ter him later."

"Oh, let him go," cried the crowd. "Here will be all ther fun we want, when ther Irisher dances. Ther kids across ther way will git ther worth of ther pennies, too."

The speaker referred to the children, who had not approached the saloon, but were standing in a group across the street.

"Wal, let's have it, then," the chagrined big fellow agreed. "Strike her up ergain, Italy, and let me see if ther Celt kin beat what I done myself. Haw, haw, haw! That 'ar was quite a joke on me, wasn't it?"

"Wea hava da lotta fun," grinned the Italian. "Da monk greatta enjoy—alla da same mea too. Hava da bigga time! Mea no slouch, alla da same da monk."

With that the fellow laid hold upon the crank again and began to grind, and when Barney had pressed the crowd gently out of his way, to make room, he stuck his big musket under his arm and began to dance.

It was an air with which his feet seemed perfectly familiar, and he made them fly in a lively manner.

The crowd enjoyed it hugely, and even "da monk" clapped its hands and tried to imitate.

"Faster! Faster!" Barney presently cried, and the time was quickened.

The crowd cheered and clapped, and Barney made his feet speed in perfect keeping with the tune.

"Faster!" he cried once more, and the Italian obliged him, the air tumbling out at such a rate that the old barrel grated and squealed horribly.

For a moment Barney kept step with the increased time, which was about as fast as music could be attempted, and then, with a wild Irish whoop, he stopped short, with hat in one hand and musket in the other above his head.

"How was dhat fur a granehorn?" he demanded.

"That was bully!" was the response.

"Give us some more!"

"Begorra, would ye have me dead on yer hands?" Barney asked. "Sure, Oi could dance no more now an' ye killed me fur it, no more Oi could. Some wan else give it a thry."

No one else was inclined to try it after that, however, so the sport ended for the time being.

And so ended what might have been a tragic scene, but for the interference in the behalf of the Chinaman by the Italian, and the timely coming of Barney O'Linn to draw attention to himself.

As it was, all were in good humor now, and even the big fellow whom the Celestial had forced to dance, was smiling all over, and proposed a treat for the crowd, which was readily accepted by most of the persons in the throng.

"Hould yer whist jest wan minnit," spoke up Barney.

"What is it?"

"Dhe monkey hasn't passed dhe hat, sure."

"Givva da monk da penna—alla da same da dolla', too," cried the Italian. "Da monk getta no penna, him feela ver' bad, alla da same mea, too. Nicolo, passa da hat to da peop'."

The monkey doffed its cap and held it out to those near, and some bits of money were dropped into it.

"Begorra, dhat is too slow," cried Barney, snatching off his own hat again. "Oi will pass me own beaver, Misther Italy; it will hould dhe more. Come, ye bloated bondholders, pony up wid yer wealth, now."

With a laugh he passed his hat around, and the contributions dropped into it liberally.

"Begob, but ye have done well!" Barney exclaimed, when he had taken up about all there was to be had. "Misther Italy, Oi belave it would pay for you and me to go into business together, so Oi do. Now 'lave me see phwat Oi can be affther dhroppin' in on me own account."

He thrust his hands into his pockets, one after another, and his face grew longer each time, till finally he drew out a paper of tobacco that was about half empty.

"Behivvins, Oi haven't a bit av small change about me clothes," he cried, "an' dhis bit av 'bakky is all Oi have to offer ye, Misther Italy. Do ye chew? No matter, Oi'll throw it in anyhow, and seein' dhat Oi did half dhe work mesel', you will have to call it square."

Into the hat the tobacco went, to the laughter of the crowd, and the hat was passed over to the delighted Italian, who did not hesitate to accept the tobacco along with the other collateral.

A little further jesting and joking, and the crown broke up, the bulk going into the saloon to accept the treat, Barney O'Linn going off up the street with his musket on his shoulder, and the Italian crossing over to the group of children and marching with them to the next point where he thought music would be acceptable.

CHAPTER XII.

AN ASTOUNDING SURPRISE.

THE two preachers had spent that forenoon going about the village like twins linked together. Arm in arm they went from place to place, the Rev. Bray introducing the Rev. Joy and making much of him everywhere, and the latter doing his part to produce a good impression.

It was given out that on the coming Sunday they would begin a series of meetings in the little church, with the intention of continuing them nightly for an indefinite time. It was expected that there would be a great revival, and the earnest Christian people of the village looked forward to it with eager anticipation.

But, Satan was abroad too, as some looked at it.

The Mexican sisters had advertised well their coming concert in the Big Horn Saloon, and that was the drawing card.

The two women had not been seen much on the street, but had been out once for a short walk, the blind one being led by the other, who appeared to be explaining to her what was to be seen.

No further excitement occurred, and the afternoon passed quietly.

On the bills of the coming concert it was announced that the doors of the saloon would be open at seven, the performance to begin at eight.

Shortly after supper at the hotel, Mlle. Claire went over to the saloon to see that everything was all right, and with another object in view. She wanted to find the Italian organ-grinder.

Goody Crawl was on hand, and welcomed her.

"You see, we have got all ready for you," he said.

"Yes, I see," was the response. "You have done nicely."

"Everything is in apple-pie order, and I hope you'll make a hit."

"Oh, I have no doubt about that. But, Mr. Crawley, can you tell me where that Italian is?"

"The Italian?"

"Yes. I'll tell you what we have thought of: If we could get him to come here and play, about the time the doors are opened, it might be a means of drawing the crowd."

"You are right, b'gosh! I reckon the fellow is down at the Peach Blow, where they took him in. If you want, I'll send down there and see, and I'll get him to come here, if he will. That will save you further trouble."

"I wish you would, sir. It is kind of you. Tell him we will pay him for it, you know."

"Oh, of course; but maybe he'll be glad to serve without pay, for the sake of getting in. To tell you the truth, I wouldn't have admitted him to the show, if you hadn't mentioned it."

"Oh, that would never do, Mr. Crawley. Do not refuse admittance to any one, unless it is some drunken and noisy fellow. Let everybody come in, and if there is any trouble we can attend to them afterward. But, there will be no trouble, I am sure."

"All right, all right; just as you say. I'll go over and see about the Italian."

The woman soon returned to the United States Hotel, and Goody set out in the direction of the Peach Blow to find "Jooly Hoopdooly."

He found the Italian in the bar-room, resting after his labor of the day, and "da monk" was asleep in a corner behind the organ. But had had their supper, and were apparently happy and contented.

Goody Crawl crossed over to where the Italian sat, and addressed him.

"Do you know who I am, my good fellow?" he asked.

"Yes; you-a da Gooda Creepa dat keepa da bigga saloon," the Italian answered.

"That's it; except that my name is Crawley, and not Creep. But, no matter about that. How would you like to come down to my place and play an hour or so?"

"You-a pay-a me?" the fellow asked quickly, making a move to get up.

"Yes; you come and play and I'll pay you," the saloon proprietor assured.

"Alla righta, mea go; alla da same da monk too."

"Come right along, then. You see, there is going to be a concert there, and we think you would help draw a crowd."

"Mea catcha on; mea know joosta how. Mea getta da monk and skippa traloo ina da one-a minute. Mea no slouch, alla da same da monk."

Goody Crawl smiled at the eagerness of the Italian to earn a little more, and returned to his saloon, the Italian not far behind him.

In a short time the cracked strains from the barrel organ were heard within the Big Horn, and the crowd was drawn that way and the saloon rapidly filled until all but the standing room had been taken.

Among those to enter had been the two parsons, arm in arm, with dignified bearing and sober step.

This had raised no little comment, but it was soon pointed out that on the bills this particular concert was spoken of as approved by the clergy.

Anyhow, they were in, and the ice having been broken to such an extent, in went everybody else who had been hanging back for conscientious scruples, and by the time the performance was to begin nearly everybody was there.

The saloon was a roomy place, but it was filled full on this occasion.

At the rear of the saloon a stage had been put up, and at the proper time the two women appeared on it, Mlle. Claire leading her blind sister, and together they made their bow to the audience.

Great applause greeted their appearance, and when it subsided Mlle. Claire addressed the people, telling them in brief the nature of the performance and their object in giving it, about as she had previously explained to a few in private. After that the performance began.

Mlle. Claire had a violin with her, and playing that, Mlle. Helene sang a song with fine effect.

Well down in front, in a place of honor as nearly as might be, sat the two parsons, twisting their thumbs in a sanctimonious way and taking in everything.

They were as solemn as owls might be, and what they thought of it could not be guessed. Occasionally they would say a word, one to the other, but never a nod or a shake of the head.

The performance was good, decidedly.

Several songs were rendered, instruments were played, singly and in duet, and there was nothing that the most strait-laced could have objected to in particular, say what they might of such things in general.

Finally, when it began to be supposed that the performance must be nearing its end, Mlle. Claire came forward alone and spoke.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she said, "we are about at the end of our programme, but before we sing our concluding duet we desire to have an expression of opinion from you regarding our performance. It is our aim to do nothing that is not strictly in accord with good morals, and this is our usual request, one which has won for us the approving voice of both press and clergy. As I see before me the two gentlemen who have been made known to me as preachers, I will call upon them to step forward here and give you their candid opinion. Will you do so, gentlemen?"

Rev. Bray looked at Joy, and Rev. Joy looked at Bray.

They exchanged a word between themselves, both nodded, and Rev. Bray stood up.

"We are willing to give you the benefit of the impression that you have made upon our minds by what we have seen and heard," he said.

"Thank you. Please come right forward here, where all can see and hear you, and give your honest opinion, freely. If you have found reason to disapprove, speak right out plainly against us."

The two men went forward with stately and solemn stride, and mounted to the platform and faced the audience, the woman retiring out of sight as they did so.

It is not our intention to quote them at length.

The Rev. Bray spoke well of the performance, admitting that he could find no fault with it except in the broad general sense, but concluding with the observation that there were higher and better things which ought to engage the thoughts, making announcement then and there of the forthcoming meetings.

After him the stranger spoke, much in the same strain, but adding a little. He said the object they had in coming there was to see and hear for themselves, mainly, but that had not been all. They wanted to win the good will of the people at large, by sharing in their pleasures as far as possible, and so draw them toward objects of a better and larger nature.

They made their bow, then, and were about to step down, when a remarkable and most unlooked-for surprise was sprung upon them and the audience together.

Out from behind the curtain at the rear, with swift and silent strides, came Barney O'Linn and Giuliano Huppazuli, the one with his big musket and the other with a brace of gleaming revolvers in hand.

Straight at the Rev. Day Lancelot Joy they sprung, and before thought or move could signify anything from the audience, their weapons touched him, the big musket on one side of his head and the revolvers on the other, and the seeming Italian, in the best of English, cried out:

"Up with your hands, Craig Morgan, or die where you stand!"

CHAPTER XIII.

SOME AMAZING ASSERTIONS.

WORDS are impotent to depict the excitement that followed.

However, some idea may be gained of it from what must of necessity be recorded of the events in order.

At the instant of feeling the weapons touch his head, and of hearing the ringing voice at his side, Rev. Joy turned as pale as death, and his hand involuntarily leaped toward a weapon.

But it was too late, then, and he could but surrender.

As for the Rev. Bray, he had staggered back at the first alarm, and at mention of the name of the dread outlaw, his face grew colorless and he held up his hands in greatest horror.

Every man and woman in the room was standing, all having sprung to their feet with one accord, and all were staring with bulging eyes at those upon the platform.

All this in one brief second, seemingly, and then, recovering himself quickly, as if by a mighty effort, the accused man demanded:

"Who and what are you? By what right do you threaten me thus? I am just what I am, and nothing more or less."

"You are a liar and a hypocrite," was the sharp retort. "You are Craig Morgan, the out-

law, better known as Devil Duval. Denial is useless, for we have the proof fast enough."

"Roight ye are, begorra!" cried Barney O'Linn. "Sure, we know ye, ye devil ye, and av ye so much as wiggle a toe or flop wan av yer ears, sure it is fillin' ye wid lead Oi'll be doin', so Oi vill."

"Yes, people of Nip-n-Tuck," spoke a woman's voice, "this wretch before you is indeed Craig Morgan, the outlaw!"

It was Mlle. Claire who spoke, as she and Mlle. Helene came to the front, they, too, with weapons in hand.

There was nothing now to indicate that the last named was blind. On the contrary, her eyes were open and flashing, as she leveled her weapon at the knave's heart.

And now, what had for a few seconds been a hum in the audience, became a wild roar, almost, and people started to crowd forward. The excitement was almost beyond all bounds.

At the front were Sinclair Fowley, Dermot Conrad, Lawyer Corker, Baldwin Bloome, George Pierre, Goody Crawl, and others who were of any importance in the town; and all were astounded beyond measure. Several had weapons in hand.

The seeming Italian, leaving his prisoner in the hands of the others, stepped to the front and indicated that he wanted to speak.

It was some time before he could make himself heard, but he waited patiently, and at last the uproar had in a measure subsided, and he raised his voice and addressed the crowd.

There was nothing of the Italian about him now, save his appearance.

"Citizens of Nip-n-Tuck," he spoke, in clear and ringing tone, "the charge I make is true, as you have heard these others declare. This man is—"

"Yas; but who is *you*?"

So some one in the room interrupted, loudly.

"I am Dick Darrel, the man who has sworn to hunt this blood-stained villain to his death. I am he who has first right to vengeance against him! I have sworn that by my hand he shall die, and I would hunt him to the earth's end. Heretofore he has escaped, but he escapes no more. Would you hear the story of my wrongs?"

There was a general shout for the story. The curiosity aroused was great beyond all belief.

Such revelations as had been made within the past minute were hardly credible, but there was proof for all in the one fact that the Italian was unquestionably not what he had seemed to be.

"I insist that you are mistaken, sir," the accused man persisted. "I am *not* Devil Duval, and I defy you to prove it against me. I am just what I seem, my friends, and I call upon you for protection against this apparently crazy fellow."

"And I am ready and prepared to prove it all," Dick retorted, sternly. "You need not call for help, for you will not get it. You are mine—*mine*—you infamous miscreant!"

"Bet yer loife on dhat!" added Barney.

"You were a fool to try this disguise a second time," Dick continued. "You ought to have known it would have betrayed you. You have been a devil indeed at hiding your identity, Craig Morgan, but you made your fatal mistake this time, much to my surprise. I expected to find you in a disguise equal to my own, if not even better."

"But, I tell you I am not your man," the outlaw insisted.

"Tell that to the wind," retorted Dick. "If necessary, I can send for a hundred men from Rough-and-Tumble who will swear to your identity. I tell you it is your last call, Craig Morgan."

"But, ther story, ther story!" urged a loud voice from the audience.

And immediately the cry was general, urging the avenger to repeat the story of his wrongs.

Dick raised a hand to enjoin silence, and when order was restored, began with a full account of his wrongs, telling his story in full as it has been set forth in the previous stories.

He had not proceeded far, when the room was so still that scarcely a sound save his voice was to be heard.

The Rev. Bray, having retired to the extreme corner of the platform, was as stiff and silent as a statue, his face still full of the horror the revelation had brought.

Doctor Conrad, Sinclair Fowley, Lawyer Corker, and the others whose names have been mentioned, and in fact everybody else, for that matter—all were silent and attentive.

At last Dandy Dick's story came down to the beginning of the hunt that had brought him to Nip-n-Tuck, and he continued:

"So, little by little, we gained upon him again, all the time strengthening ourselves for what we had mutually resolved should be the last round in the terrible struggle. Disguise after disguise did he assume, at times baffling us and almost throwing us off the track, but we clung to him, sometimes almost by luck alone, as it seemed, and at last we got a definite idea of his plan and prepared for him. He was coming here to Nip-n-Tuck with the intention of robbing the mine of its storage bullion—an idea he had had in mind for a long time; and we laid our scheme for foiling him."

"One thing worked in our favor. He was alone—"

"Alone!" exclaimed Doctor Conrad. "What of the Invisible Seven?"

"I know nothing about them," answered Dick, "but I do not know that this villain had no ally with him when he came here."

"Go on with your story."

"Well, in looking about for a disguise, I thought of the one you have seen me in. I made the acquaintance of an Italian, made a study of his dialect for a little while, and bought his barrel-organ and monkey, stained my skin, rigged myself up suitably, and set out upon my mission. While I was doing this, my allies had been keeping to the trail. I took it up then, and they adopted the disguises I had outlined for them, and with our plan all arranged, we came here. Now, let me call to mind one or two things that have happened since our arrival."

"The robbery is one thing," spoke up Sinclair Fowley.

"You are right," agreed Dick, "and—"

"And Craig Morgan, if this man be truly he, shall swing for it!"

"Never!" cried Dick. "This chief of execrable knaves dies by my hand! I have sworn it many times, and I repeat it! Let me finish. He knows—rather, knew—that we were upon his track. He was even anxious to find out our manner of disguise as speedily as possible when we tracked him to a new place. After this robbery, who was it that proposed to have all strangers searched, trying to find Devil Duval? Was it not this devil in saintly garb? His object was to discover me. But, I foiled him, for my device was too crafty for him in this instance, for a wonder. He did discover Barney, however, and that led him to look out for danger."

"Making that discovery, what did he do? Did he not invite Barney to say whether or not he was the outlaw? Barney looked at him, and recognized him as the man we wanted! He was careful not to let his discovery be known, however, but took pains to make me aware of it, though I had already made the same discovery. When I was playing the organ this afternoon down by a saloon in the lower part of the village, Barney joined the crowd and engaged in a dance, seemingly out of fun, but it was the plan he had figured out for communicating with me without arousing suspicion. In passing his hat for me, after the dance was done, he playfully threw half a paper of tobacco into it. In that paper was a written note!"

Dick paused for a second, and a loud round of applause greeted what he had told.

"Where is the bullion you stole, you knave?" cried Sinclair Fowley, standing up and shaking his fist at the outlaw prisoner.

Craig Morgan smiled, his sinister, devilish smile.

"Let me inform you, sir," spoke up Dandy Dick, "that Devil Duval was not the person who robbed the mine office."

"Not the person!"

The cry was in one general voice.

"Not the person," Dick repeated. "Heinous rascal as he is, he is not guilty of that one crime."

"Then maybe you can tell us who is, sir?" insinuated the doctor.

"Perhaps I might, had I time to investigate it for you," was the easy reply. "I have hunted out secrets before."

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried Lawyer Corker.

"Devil Duval robbed the mine, and no one else, that is plain. Maybe you will deny that he wrote upon these posters here," pointing at the bulletin board.

"So I do deny," Dick coolly responded. "If you will take careful note of the writing on the various posters about the town, sir, you will see that it is not in the same hand in every case. It looks to me as though several persons had taken a hand in that trick."

Men looked upon the fearless detective in amazement.

What was to be thought of this?

For a little time again confusion reigned, as

everybody had something to say to his elbow neighbor, and it was some little time before Dick could conclude his story.

Nothing like this had ever happened at Nip-n-Tuck before, and it drove her respectable, easy-going and highly virtuous citizens almost crazy with excitement. How was it going to end?

CHAPTER XIV. UNEXPECTED EVIDENCE.

DURING all this time Craig Morgan, for the prisoner was he beyond question, had stood silent upon the stage, covered by the weapons of the three who were around him.

He had dropped his sanctimonious look, and the smile that curled his lips in hateful scorn was anything but parson-like. His admiring "brother" had deserted him, and had now got down from the platform and was standing in the audience.

Barney O'Linn, with Mary Warne and Pearl Mayne—for they the two pretending Mexican sisters had been disclosed to be—never took their eyes off their prisoner for a single instant, and Barney, for additional precaution, had disarmed him as he stood helpless.

"How do you know these things?" demanded Doctor Conrad, when he could make his voice heard.

Eager to hear the response, the crowd became silent.

"What things?" asked Dick. "That Devil Duval did not rob the mine, and that he did not write upon these notices?"

"Exactly."

"Why, I know that this pretending preacher is Devil Duval, and I know that he spent the night with your Rev. Bray."

"That is true, so he did," the Rev. Bray supported; "and I cannot believe that my guest is the terrible outlaw. It seems impossible. Oh, Brother Joy, can't you disprove the awful charge that is made against you?"

"I don't see how they are going to prove it against me, dear Brother Bray," was the response, but with that Satanic smile.

Dandy Dick turned to his brave allies.

"Mary Warne, sister of my wronged and lost wife, say who this person is!" he demanded.

"He is Devil Duval, the Outlaw," was the firm response.

"Pearl Mayne," turning to her, "who say you this fellow is?"

"He is Craig Morgan—heaven's curse upon him!" was the choking cry.

"An' bedad ye naden't be askin' me who he is," cried Barney O'Linn. "Sure, Oi would know the murtherin' villain anywhere in any rig. It is Devil Duval, and never a bit av a doubt about it."

"But, who does the man himself declare he is?" asked Sinclair Fowley.

"I am what I am," the prisoner declared, boldly. "Give me time, and I will prove it to your satisfaction."

"That seems fair," spoke out Doctor Conrad. "We can't allow you to harm the man till the case is made plain, and even then the law must take its course."

"Of course!" exclaimed Lawyer Corker. "The dignity of the law must not be permitted to suffer. If there is anything we pride ourselves upon here, it is our upholding of the law."

"I have no objection to your putting the matter to the proof, gentlemen," replied Dandy Dick, "but I will take advantage of the delay and bring overwhelming proof to support my charge. And then, after that, the matter must be settled between us, man to man, whether the dignity of the law is upheld or not—from your point of view. There is a law higher than any that is written, and this case must be settled according to that code."

"No, no; that will never do, here," objected Doctor Conrad. "Would you fight a duel here before our women and children? For shame!"

"You look hyar," suddenly broke in the voice of Ham Stanton. "Seems ter me ther feller is right, an' I am of ther opine that ther majority of ther people of this hyar town will favor his bavin' his revenge in his own way."

"An' it hits me purty hard that this hyar camp—"

"Village," corrected the doctor.

"You ber darn!" snapped Simon Slow, for it was he the doctor had interrupted. "It hits me purty hard that this hyar camp o' Nip-n-Tuck hev a marshal, an' that I'm ther man. Mister Dandy Dick, what do you want done with thet thar crooked cuss till we has proved his case?"

"I want him locked up, under strong guard," was the reply.

"Yer shall have it, b'gosh! I'm ther mar-

shal of this hyar camp—camp are good enough fer common folks, an' I so order it. I'll be up thar an' help ye in a jiffy."

There was another great buzz of excitement then, but the virtuous upholders of the law could not lawfully oppose the marshal of the town, and so Mr. Slow was allowed to push forward and get up on the platform.

During this break, Dandy Dick had snapped a pair of handcuffs upon his prisoner.

When Marshal Slow came upon the stage he laid a hand upon the prisoner's shoulder, and he was a prisoner indeed, then, in the eyes of Nip-n-Tuck.

Dick turned again to the crowd.

"It seems to me needless for me to tell the little that remains of my story," he remarked. "The rest is easily understood. However, let it be as you say."

"Let us have all thar is of it, by all means," cried Ham Stanton.

And the crowd echoing his demand, Dick took up the thread at the point where he had dropped it.

"I have given you the history of this arch villain from first to last," he spoke. "What you have seen of him here, is in keeping with his character generally. I can bring proof undeniable that he is the outlaw upon whose head that reward is placed," indicating the poster on the bulletin board, "if you are going to insist upon proof further than I already give you. I have little more to tell, and only—"

"By ruin! Devil Duval, and a prisoner!"

It was a voice in high exclamation, and it came from the rear of the room.

A man had just entered, and after one brief glance around, that was what he uttered upon beholding the outlaw.

Dandy Dick Darrel cast one swift glance in his direction, and cried:

"Colonel Jim Hoxley, as I live!"

Instantly Fowley wheeled around, looking to see the man, while the outlaw prisoner grew white to the lips and his bold front broke down.

"That's me!" the hearty voice cried in response, "but, who in ruin are you?"

"I'm Dick Darrel, though I don't look much like myself just now. Come up here and tell us who this man is. Proof is demanded."

"Not Jim Hoxley from Paradise Pocket?" had exclaimed Sinclair Fowley.

The new-comer was pushing to the front, and glancing in the direction of the mine-manager, responded heartily:

"Hello, Sinclair Fowley, here you are, eh? Yes, I'm the Jim Hoxley from Paradise, you bet! But, what kind of a jubilee is this you are having here? You have got the devil at last, I see!"

The two grasped hands.

"Then the fellow really is Devil Duval?" questioned Fowley.

"Is he? I'm not the man to forget a face so easy, in so short a time; and I'd know him anywhere in that preacher rig."

"Thank you, Hoxley," said Darrel. "Are you satisfied, citizens of Nip-n-Tuck?"

"There's no room for doubt, now," admitted Fowley. "He is the man, boys, sure, and his appearance proves it. Look at him, will you?"

Colonel Jim Hoxley had now left Mr. Fowley and hurried forward to the platform, where he grasped the hand of Dandy Dick in hearty pressure, and afterward shook hands with the others as well.

"Deny that you are Craig Morgan, do you?" he then cried, facing the prisoner. "By ruin, but you had better not deny it when I'm around! Why, you scoundrel, we'll take you over to Paradise and see what the boys there will say about you! Not Devil Duval, eh? Ha, ha, ha!"

With a mighty effort the prisoner had recovered his coolness and his defiance of manner, and now he retorted:

"It seems no use to deny it further, gentlemen, so I will own the corn. I am Devil Duval. What are you going to do about it? Attempt to harm me, and my men will make short work of you."

Such a threat, from such a man, had much weight.

Many there were who had immediate business out of that room, not caring to become targets for stray bullets.

"That will not serve you," spoke Dandy Dick, smiling. "I will hold you this time in spite of a force from the lower regions. You are mine, and by my hand you shall die; you execrable monster!"

"You bet he shall!" echoed Colonel Jim.

"It seems a plain case now," here put in Doctor Conrad, "and I don't see how we can raise

any further objections to Mr. Darrel's having the revenge he seeks."

"But, the law—the law!" cried Corker. "How are you going to get around the law?"

"I'm not going to try to get around it, in this case, sir," declared Dick. "I am going to take it into my own hands, for the law is far too lenient to deal with this devil in human guise."

"Right, right!" cried Colonel Jim. "Put yourself in his place, boys, and think what you would do, after suffering the wrongs this young man has suffered."

"I'd 'a' shot ther cuss on sight, if it had been me!" cried Ham Stanton.

"And that would not have half satisfied your desire for sweet revenge," said Dick. "When I think of all I have suffered, it is hard to resist doing that very thing; but I want more—more than that!"

"And what do yer call more, in ther name o' wonder?" cried Ham. "Ain't his life all ye kin git?"

"Yes, that is all; but, I want to take it in my own way. I must meet him, on even footing, man to man and knife to knife, and nothing else will ever satisfy me."

"What! Run ther risk of yer own life?"

"Yes; pit my life against his own. I am a man, and will take no advantage, but woe to him when I meet him, that is all."

"And when are ye goin' ter do it?"

It was the marshal who asked this.

"I want daylight for it," Dick answered. "I want him locked up for the night, and to-morrow morning I will meet him and fight him to the death. If I fall—well, I will have done my part."

"But, ye are givin' dhe spalpeen another chance to escape!" cried Barney.

"Am I, Barney?" returned Dick, smiling. "I am going to be locked up in the calaboose with him, and if he gets away from me again, I will give up the strife, that is all. I shall never lose sight of this imp of Satan again, while both of us live, be sure of that."

CHAPTER XV.

A PRIVATE COMPACT.

THERE was, however, something else on foot in that room.

Ham Stanton, talking to the circle about him, had expressed it as his opinion that such a double-dyed villain as Craig Morgan ought to be hanged then and there.

It was, he declared, a wrong to let Dick Darrel risk his life in fighting the outlaw, no matter how much he desired to do so. He thought a rope would speedily give him all the satisfaction he could reasonably demand, and there were plenty who agreed with this view.

"I tell ye it are not ther right thing ter do, to allow that feller to put up his life against sech a p'iz-n critter as this hyar Devil Duval, an' I object to it."

"But," reminded one, "you said you was in favor of his havin' his revenge in his own way, an' you was goin' ter see that he had it, too."

"I know that; but, ther more I see of this Dandy Dick, ther more I like him, an' it are a wrong ter let him take sech chances; don't yer see? I think we'd order take ther cuss an' string him up."

By this time most—in fact nearly all—of the women and children had taken their leave from the room, fearing that trouble was coming.

This little cloud grew bigger at each moment, and about the time when Dick made the remark that closed the preceding chapter, the hum of disapproval was loud enough to draw his notice.

"Hello! what is the matter, citizens?" he called out.

Ham Stanton took it upon himself to reply.

"We is goin' ter hang that cuss," he declared.

Devil Duval recoiled, and placed himself behind Dick and Barney, acting upon impulse rather than reason.

"You are going to hang him?" Dick repeated.

"I guess not, my friends."

"Oh, but we are!" insisted Ham, and he pushed toward the stage. "We ain't goin' ter see you put yer life against his—"

"Stop! Hold hard right where you are!" Dick ordered, and his revolvers covered the crowd. "I feel obliged to you for your interest, in one way, boys, but I can't allow you to carry out your purpose. Devil Duval is my prey, and I claim first right in dealing with him. Don't come a step nearer!"

"And here's phwat says so, too, begob!" supplemented Barney, presenting his big musket to the fore. "Av ye don't want to hear a spat-

therin' av buckshot out dhere, don't ye thry to com'pany nearer."

"Where is your calaboose, marshal?" asked Dick, turning to Marshal Slow.

"Right out hyar, not fur from ther rear of this saloon," was the answer.

"Very well; let's get the prisoner there as soon as we can. Barney, you hold the crowd. Colonel Jim," to Hoxley, "obhge me by favoring my side in this matter, will you?"

"I will, by ruin!" was the promise. "Go on and put yer man in a safe place, and the crowd shall not follow you."

Dick then, with the help of Marshal Slow, laid hold upon Morgan, and he was rushed out through the rear door and hurried away to the lock-up, where Dick made him secure, and remained with him.

Dandy Dick was fully determined that this should be, as he had termed it, the "last round."

"Tell Stanton not to try to take my prisoner from me," he said to the marshal at parting. "I am armed, and I will make a fight for it, if they force it upon me. I think they had better go slow and leave me to deal with this matter alone."

"All right," Slow responded. "I am on your side, and I'll see that you have a fair show, if I kin give it to ye, you bet."

"I believe you will."

"Do you want ter see yer man?"

"Yes; tell Barney to come here, and also Colonel Jim Hoxley, if he will."

Just then, however, Barney appeared upon the scene and announced his presence to his master.

"Dey have give it up," he said. "You are safe, Masther Dick."

"Good enough! But, Barney, I want you to get some good men and remain on guard till daylight. You will find them, won't you, marshal?"

This the marshal promised, and went away, leaving Barney at the door, his big musket in hand ready for business.

As soon as the marshal had gone, Dandy Dick faced the foe, and there in the narrow confines of the calaboose, by the dim light of a lantern which hung from the ceiling, their eyes met.

Dandy Dick's eyes burned with the fire of vengeance, while those of the outlaw glowed with hatred and defiance.

"Craig Morgan, the time has come!" Dandy Dick hissed.

The outlaw paled. "Do you mean to kill me now, and in cold blood, without giving me a chance?" the outlaw asked.

"No; I do not intend that, though that is what you richly deserve," was the stern response. "What I mean is, that there is no more escape for you. I shall give you a chance for your life, little as you merit such mercy."

"A coward's way of giving a chance, I suppose," the outlaw sneered.

"What do you mean?" cried Dick.

"You will fight me here in the village. If they see me getting the advantage, your friends will rush in and prevent my killing you. And, even should I kill you, they would riddle me with bullets the next moment. You have tried that plan before, every time, but I managed to escape from you, nevertheless."

"Craig Morgan, you wrong me!" Dandy Dick declared. "You know there is not one drop of coward's blood in my veins. My only thought has been to fight you fairly, and to kill you. I had looked at it in no other light. Since you cast such an insinuation up to me, we will arrange some other plan. I will somehow manage to go with you to some secluded spot, where no one can witness our fight."

"And if I kill you, then I am free?"

"Of course; it can not be otherwise."

"Excellent! I am with you heart and soul for such a meeting. I am tired of having you dogging my steps, and the sooner I stop you the better."

"Or get stopped short in your career of crime yourself. It will be a bitter fight, and one or the other of us must fall."

"Ha, ha! That one will not be I."

"I swear that it shall be you alone, or both of us together."

"We will see about that."

"Then we have one common purpose in view, to get away where no one can see us fight our duel to the death."

"Yes. If I win, my escape will then be assured."

"And in so doing, I am proving to you that I am playing no craven's part."

"Nothing could prove it clearer, Dick Dar-

rel. Any other plan will stamp you a coward and a cur."

"We have our opinions about that; but no such charge shall be laid to me in this affair of life's blood. It shall be a fair fight, man to man."

Dick called to Barney, then, asking him if he could get in.

"No, sor," was the reply; "Oi can't. Dhe marshal has dhe key."

"When he comes back, get it from him, and tell him it is my wish that it be left with you. But, I will explain that myself. If he don't come when Hoxley comes, you go and find him and bring him here."

"Yis, sor."

Meanwhile the excitement in the saloon had increased, if anything, and Colonel Jim Hoxley and Sinclair Fowley were having all they could do to deter Ham Stanton and his followers from making a rush and attack upon the jail.

"Ye had better go slow, Ham," advised the marshal, taking in the situation at a glance on his return. "Dick Darrel is locked up with the prisoner, and he is armed and will make it hot if ye try to get his man away from him. Better go a little slow, I tell ye."

"Have you heard Dick Darrel's story?" asked Colonel Jim.

"Yes," the shout.

"Then can you wonder that he wants to meet his foe in duel? Would one of you put a straw in his way? Would you cheat him of the revenge that is justly his? No; I cannot believe it of you!"

"But, ther p'izen cuss may be ther best man," argued Ham.

"If that is the case, we must see that Darrel does not get the worst of it."

"And there would be a good deal of a fair fight about that, now wouldn't there, I'd like ter know?"

"If we interfered, Darrel could not help it. Rest assured that he would not approve of it, if he knew it was intended. He wants it a fight to the death, man to man."

"And run ther resk of his life fer nothin'. It ain't right, b'gosh!"

"Well, as the affair is not to be settled till daylight, think over it well, and I believe you will agree that Darrel ought to be allowed to have his way in the matter."

Finally this truce was tacitly agreed to, and the excitement began to subside.

It was only for the time, however. The morning was looked forward to with such feverish eagerness that it was only a lull.

The marshal and several more returned to the calaboose, where Barney O'Linn made known to the marshal what Dandy Dick desired with regard to the key, and it was finally left in the young Irishman's keeping.

Several men were posted around the jail as guardsmen, with Barney at their head, and their only order was to see to it that Devil Duval did not get out of the hands of Dandy Dick. And after Sinclair Fowley and Colonel Jim Hoxley had taken leave, after an interview with Dick, the town gradually sunk into quiet and darkness.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE INVISIBLE SEVEN INTERFERE.

NIGHT was over all, and silence reigned in the village of Nip-n'-Tuck, when seven persons drew together in a glade near the town.

It was doubly dark there, and the seven were entirely invisible, but they drew together by means of signals, and finally stood in a group unseen and silent. Who and what were they?

"Are we all here?" asked one, in whisper.

In response, each of the others spoke a number, proving his presence. The responses were six.

"Good," whispered the questioner. "The Invisible Seven are met for the purpose of discussing a question of great moment. You all know what I mean."

"We do. We do."

"What must be the fate of this Dandy Dick Darrel?"

"Death!"

"And of Devil Duval?"

"The same."

"We are of one mind, that is positive; but, how is this to be accomplished?"

There was silence after this question.

"It was the death-warrant of Dandy Dick, that he happened here at the time he did," the head of the Seven continued. "It will not be safe for us to allow such a man to remain alive to work against us."

"You are right, in that," another voice agreed. "And as urgent a reason, but differ-

ent, makes Devil Duval as much to be dreaded by us."

"That is how it stands, and both must die."

"That brings us back to the unanswered question."

"As to the means to be employed to bring it about. Has any of you anything to suggest?"

"Let them fight it out; maybe they will kill each other."

"A good plan, were we sure it would work. Darrel may come off victor, however, and in that case he would be licnized."

"Still, he may be killed, in which case the outlaw would surely be either shot or hanged. It is a good idea, none the less, for by it we are sure to be rid of one, and the other we can take care of later."

"It is the best plan."

Again the leader spoke.

"If that plan could be improved upon," he remarked.

"What do you mean?" another asked.

"If it could be made certain death to both—"

"That is just what we are after! How can it be done?"

Every word was in cautious whisper, and no names were spoken. It was a meeting in which the greatest caution was being observed.

"Suppose they were to fight with poisoned knives," the leader suggested. "A poison so deadly that a scratch with one of the knives would mean almost certain death to the victim."

"Ha! you have struck it!"

"But, the poison?"

"It can be had. It is a thought that has come to me."

"And a good one. It is not likely that either of them will escape free of wounds, and a wound, however slight, would be enough. You have struck the very plan, and no need to look further."

"How is it to be carried out?"

"It will be no easy task, but it must be done. You see how the matter stands now, and it will never do for us to let the opportunity slip by. While this excitement at Nip-n'-Tuck is at its height, is the time for us to strike."

"Yes; that is true. Dandy Dick believes that Devil Duval did not rob the office of the mine, and once he settles with his foe he will turn his attention to that. On the other hand, Devil Duval, should he escape, will want to know who is making capital of his reputation. Yes; we must strike, and our blow must be effective, too."

"There must be no failure, and there is no reason for any. Are you all agreed on this plan?"

"We are."

"Then it is understood. Will you trust it all to me?"

"Yes; you attend to it."

"I will do so. In case of failure, from any cause, then we shall have to plan anew. Are we ready to disperse?"

No common rascals, these, as their language well proved.

Invisibly they had come, invisibly they had been throughout, and invisibly they had stalked away in the darkness. Well were they called the Invisible Seven.

The night was far spent, and the guardsmen around the jail were half dozing, when suddenly they were startled wide-awake in a moment.

There had come a thud against the door of the rude structure, followed by the falling of some object upon the board step below, and Barney O'Linn, who had been leaning against the doorpost, uttered an exclamation.

"Begorra," he cried, straightening up, musket in hand, "phwat was dhat?"

"What was that sound, Barney?" demanded the voice of Dick Darrel from within. "Is everything all right?"

"Divil a wan av me can guess phwat it was," responded Barney. "Did due rest av ye hear it, b'ys?"

The guardsmen all answered that they had heard it, and one thoughtfully proposed a search.

"Dhat's so, begob!" cried Barney. "Sure, dhe t'ought was startled out av me, so it was. Pawatever it was, sure it drapped down here on dhe shtep."

"Maybe it was something that was thrown against the door by some one, Barney," Dandy Dick suggested. "Look at once and see. The rest of you keep your eyes well about you, for it may be a ruse to draw your attention."

"Begorra, Oi have it," Barney almost immediately cried.

He stooped and picked up something he had discovered by feeling with his foot.

"What is it?" asked Dick.

"Sure, it's a small bundle done up in a rag, is all."

"Bring it in here. The rest of you keep the sharpest kind of a lookout, and challenge the first man who approaches."

Not for a moment had Dick Darrel closed his eyes in sleep. Craig Morgan had been asleep, though he was awake now, but Dandy Dick not at all. He was fully determined that no chance for escape should be allowed.

Barney unlocked the door of the cabin, for it was little more than that, and entered, handing the parcel to Dick.

It was about a foot long, as thick through as a man's arm, and wrapped in old cloth and tied with a string. It weighed perhaps a pound.

As Dick held it up to the light to look at it, a bit of paper on it caught his eye, and looking more closely he discovered that the parcel was addressed to him, in pencil.

"What have you got?" asked the outlaw.

"We'll soon see," responded Dick.

He cut the string that bound the parcel, unrolled the cloth, and there in his hand lay two glittering bowies, dread-looking and keen. And with them was a penciled note.

Allowing the outlaw to see the weapons, with a grim smile as he did so, he opened the note and read:

"DICK DARREL:—

"I send you weapons for your duel. You may rely upon them fully. Fight that accursed villain, and to the death, and may victory be yours! I am in favor of the duel, though many others are against it."

SECRET FRIEND.

"What do you think of my present, Craig Morgan?" Dick grimly asked. "They are better knives than our own, I believe, and certainly will be alike, so that there will be no advantage of weapon for either of us. Shall we fight with them?"

"Yes; if you want to. It makes little difference to me. My own knife is of about this pattern, and one of these will stand me fully as well in hand. I will take my choice of them, of course. Somebody is interested in our fight, anyhow, even though he be friend of yours and not of mine."

At that instant one of the guardsmen without was heard to utter a challenge, and Barney opened the door and stepped out to see who was approaching now.

CHAPTER XVII.

A TIMELY WARNING GIVEN.

WHEN Barney stepped out, he found two of the guardsmen covering with their weapons a shadowy form that was outlined in the darkness a few steps away.

"Who is that?" Barney quickly asked.

"It is ther Chinee, I think, by his speak," answered one of the men.

"Phwat do ye want?" Barney asked, louder.

"Me alle samee Yang Kee," the Chinaman hoarsely whispered. "Me wantee speak to 'Melican man."

"Well, come on wid ye, dhen," Barney invited, "but begorra ye want to kape a cl'ane nose or it will be bad fur ye. If ye are up to any thrick, it is a yaller corpus ye will be afore ye know it, so ye will."

Yang Kee strode quickly forward, holding up his hands to show that he was disarmed.

"Hould on roight dhere, now," Barney ordered, when he had come within a few feet. "Ye are quite close enough, so ye are. Say phwat ye have to say and be done with it."

"Yang Kee he come to warn 'Melican man of danger," the Celestial whispered. "Me wantee see boss. Havee you find anything here?"

"Yes; we has found something," answered one of the guardsmen. "What of it, you heathen?"

"Findee two biggee knifee?" the fellow questioned.

"Dhat's phwat it was," owned Barney.

"Allee samee much d'anger!" the Celestial excitedly whispered. "Me wantee see boss allee samee mighty quick."

"Let the fellow come in, Barney," called out Dick. "If he means any treachery he'll get a bullet. And you keep your eyes peeled out there, at the same time, for it may be a trick."

"Yang Kee no fooler 'Melican man," the Chinaman earnestly insisted, in his low and excited whisper.

"All roight, begob, an' ye may come in; but av ye are up to any gum game, may dbe good saints help ye, dhat's all. Come along wid ye, ye spalpeen."

With that, Barney opened the door, and the Chinaman followed him into the prison.

The Celestial addressed Dick immediately, demanding:

"You gittee two knifee?"

"Yes; here they are," Dick responded, exhibiting them.

At sight of them, the heathen seemed to shrink back in affright, and he almost gasped:

"'Melican man looker out! Knifee much badlee—much ploison—much killee! Gittee sklatch with knifee, sure die!"

Both Dandy Dick and Craig Morgan looked at the Chinaman in amazement, their faces wearing a startled look for the instant.

"Poisoned!" cried Dick. "What can this mean?"

"It is some infernal scheme," declared the outlaw.

"How do you know this?" Dick demanded of the Chinaman.

"Me hear little, me guessee all right!" was the answer. "You no touchee point of knifee!"

"By heavens!" cried Dick, "if this is so, there is deeper work going on here than I thought for. Who can have done this?"

"Somebody who wants to get rid of both of us, that is sure, if both the weapons are fixed alike," the outlaw decided. "It must be the work of that Invisible Seven we have heard about."

"Then I was right in supposing that you had nothing to do with them?" queried Dick.

"You were; I know nothing about them."

"You did not rob the mine?"

"I did not, sad to say."

"And you did not put your name to the notices around the town?"

"Of course not. How could I do it, in one night, in all those places? It was a fool job, and overdone. If it had been on one or two, it might have deceived you, but on them all—Pah!"

"I thought I could not be mistaken in my guess," Dick asserted. "Here is a mystery worth grappling with, and when I am done with you, Craig Morgan, I shall undertake it, I believe. At present I have business of more importance on hand."

"When you are done with me!" sneered the outlaw. "When you are done with me, Dick Darrel, you will be food for coyotes."

"We shall see about that. But, Chinaman, what brought you here to warn me of this?"

"'Melican man done goodee turn for Yang Kee; Yang Kee allee samee do goodee turn for 'Melican man. Savvy?"

"Hal that's it, eh? Well, I am greatly obliged to you. But, how came you to know this? Who was it that poisoned the knives? Come, tell us all about it."

"Yang Kee hear two galootee talk in dark; Yang Kee listen. Say poison two knifee, 'Melican man fight, allee samee kill two bird with samee stone. Yang Kee keepee eye peel."

"And you don't know who these fellows were?"

"Allee samee nixey!"

"Well, it beats the deuce. But, isn't there a chance for a mistake? How are we going to prove that these blades are poisoned?"

"Holdee on!" said the Chinaman, quickly. "Me go gittee cat! give cat a sklatch with knifee, soon see if knifee killee. You holdee on! Yang Kee comee soon back again."

He made for the door, and Barney stepped out after him.

While he was gone, Dick and his foe talked the situation over, but they were unable to get at the truth of it.

Presently the Celestial returned, with a cat in his arms, and directed Dick to prick it with the point of one of the knives, which was done.

The cat gave a yell, at the touch of the sharp knife-point, and sprang out of the Chinaman's arm's trying to find some means of escape from the room. But of a sudden it stopped short, a spasm seized it, and in a few moments more it sunk to the floor, and, in a little while more, was stone dead.

"Great heavens!" gasped Dandy Dick, "see what we have escaped! Yang Kee, you have saved my life!" and he seized the Chinaman's hand as he spoke, pressing it warmly.

As for Morgan, he was white to the lips, and a perspiration was on his forehead.

"I would like to know who has done this thing," he cried. "Don't you know more than you have told us, Chinaman?"

"No; me allee samee savvy no more," Yang Kee declared. "Savvy only what have tellee you. You bettee heap big lascaloty on footee; Yang Kee findee out some, allee samee!"

"Do you think it's the Invisible Seven, Yang Kee?"

"Don't know; findee out, you bettee! But, Yang Kee have to skipee out, or be findee here, for soon gittee light now."

He stood not on the order of going, either, but was off without another word, and as the door was opened it was discovered that it was growing light. It was time for Dick Darrel to take action.

"It is time for us to think about business," Dick spoke. "You are of the same mind still, Craig Morgan?"

"Yes; let us get away where we can settle this thing alone together. But we want nothing to do with poisoned weapons. Put them out of sight, and where they can do no harm. Let me see you do it, too."

"Very well, you shall. See, I wrap them up again, and tie them. Barney, you take charge of these, and do not let them go out of your possession. And, Craig Morgan, since you are afraid I will use one of them against you, I will make sure that this knife of yours is not poisoned."

"You believe, then, that I am in this plot?"

"I do not; but I take no chances, for you are as subtle as the father of lies himself."

And with that Dick took the outlaw's knife, which he had in keeping, and gave its blade a thorough cleaning. Barely had he done, when a loud hum of voices was heard, and he sprang to his feet in alarm.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FOR LIFE AND FOR VENGEANCE.

BARNEY, who had been inside for a time, immediately sprang out to learn what it meant.

He found it growing light, and discovered a great crowd of men on the public Square between the big hotel and the saloon nearest at hand.

What it meant he could not guess.

Dick, too, had stepped to the door. His one fear was that the people of the town meant to take his prey from him.

"I must know the meaning of this, Barney," he cried. "I will run over there, without drawing notice, and find out. Do you cover that fiend with your rifle while I am gone, and kill him rather than let him escape."

Without waiting for Barney's response, Dick ran in the direction of the gathering crowd.

When he had come near enough to catch what was being said, he speedily learned what it meant, and saw that he must act with all haste.

Ham Stanton was at the head of the mob, as it appeared, and he was impressing it upon them that it was their duty to hang the notorious outlaw, and not let Dick Darrel risk his life in fighting him.

Many were in favor of this, and it seemed that there was to be a move made in the direction of the calaboose speedily, but suddenly another voice was heard, and there was silence while it addressed the crowd in brief words. It was the voice of Doctor Conrad.

"What are you going to do, Ham Stanton?" he cried. "Would you disgrace this town by a lynching? Would you work against your marshal, the very man whom you made what he is? Better far to let that man Darrel have his revenge in his own way, than to do what you propose. Think before you act."

"We hev done that 'ar," responded Stanton. "We have made up our minds that Darrel 'ar too good a man to put up his life against sech a worthless one as that of ther outlaw, an' we ain't a-goin' ter see it done, nuther, b'gosh! We are goin' ter take ther cuss out of town an' hang him as he deserves. Now, it ain't no use ter argy with us, fer it won't change our plans a bit."

"Marshal! Marshal Slow!" the doctor called. "Is this your will, too? Are you going back on the law?"

"No, it ain't none o' my work," Simon Slow cried out. "I am in favor of lettin' Dick Darrel have it out with ther galoot."

"And here, too!" cried Colonel Jim Hoxley, as he came bounding out of the hotel, finishing dressing as he came. "It won't do, boys, it won't do!"

Dandy Dick had waited to hear no more, but was running toward the calaboose with all speed.

It was now becoming light enough to see objects distinctly, and he knew that it must be now or never, for Ham Stanton and his followers were certainly in earnest.

The war of words between the two parties on the Square waxed hot and strong, but Dick heard no more of it, and it concerned him little. Neither side was in sympathy with his plan.

Bounding into the calaboose, he cut the cords that bound the outlaw's feet, exclaiming:

"Come, you fiend, or it will be too late. The mob intend hanging you, and on the speed of

your legs will depend the only chance for your life."

Morgan was upon his feet instantly.

"Free my hands, too," he cried, "or I can't half run. This is no trick; you are armed and I am not. If you see me escaping, shoot me down. I must get away from the mob at any cost."

"All right," freeing his hands, "for you are no more anxious to escape than I am to have you escape. You are mine, and no other hand shall deal with you than my own. Come, now, quick! Barney, cover our retreat, and hold the crowd back for half an hour at any cost."

Out from the calaboose did Darrel and the outlaw dash, then, and off up the valley in the direction of the nearest exit, a narrow pass between two giant cliffs, beyond which lay wooded glens, and they ran at their best speed, as though life for both depended upon their efforts. The one was accepting a chance for life, the other eager for vengeance with his own hand.

For a moment Barney O'Linn stood looking after them, and as he looked he was rapidly thinking.

"Begorra!" he cried, "but we can never hould dhe crowd here, me b'ys. We must get up dhere to dhe pass before dhey discover dhe gone av me masther!"

Without hesitation, seeing that he was right in his judgment, he ran in the direction Dick had gone, his big musket in hand. And he ran alone, for the others did not know whether their business was with the mob or not.

About the time when Barney started, or only a moment later, the crowd made a rush for the jail, to call it such, and in a few seconds had surrounded it.

Ham Stanton went to the door, and was not a little surprised to find it open.

"What means this?" he cried.

"It means they have gone," was the response.

"Gone? Gone where?"

"Off up ther valley, ter fight it out atween themselves."

"Good!" cried Doctor Conrad. "We are well clear of the whole trouble. Let them have it out, is my advice."

"Never!" cried Stanton. "That brave young feller sha'n't lose his life in that 'ar foolish way, if I kin help it. After 'em, boyees, hot!"

Leading the way, he ran up the valley toward the pass, where Dick and his foe had so recently disappeared, and where Barney O'Linn was plainly seen, nearing it. It was a strange affair, all in all.

After Ham Stanton poured the crowd, most of them his eager supporters, but many opposed to him and favoring the doctor, the marshal and Colonel Jim Hoxley. Sinclair Fowley, too, was now out, and his voice was in favor of Dick's being allowed to fight it to the death.

The remaining guardsmen at the calaboose had not mentioned the intentions of Barney O'Linn, and when Ham and his men reach the pass a surprise awaited them.

There stood the brave young Irishman, his old musket at his shoulder, and as Ham came up he shouted:

"Hould on, dhere! Hould on, Oi say! By dhe powers an ye don't, dhere will be a whole-sale slaughter av dhe innocints among ye, an' don't ye forget dhat. Not a man av ye passes here alive!"

The crowd halted, needless to say.

"Irisher, you're a fool!" thundered Ham Stanton. "You are givin' that 'ar cuss a chance ter kill yer master."

"An' by dhe same token," replied Barney, "it is givin' me masther a chance to kill him Oi am doing, so Oi am. Never a step nearer, now, or off she goes!"

"Good for you," complimented Doctor Conrad. "Your master deserves the revenge he seeks, and he is ridding our village of a highly unpleasant business, to say the least about it."

"Let them have it out," cried Jim Hoxley. "It is what Dick Darrel has lived for. Let him have the revenge that he is justly entitled to."

"So say I," agreed Marshal Slow, "and here's what backs it up, too."

With his words, he turned his face to the crowd, with weapons drawn, and backed to Barney's side.

"By the gosh!" cried Ham Stanton, "but this hyer sha'n't be! If you have no feelin' fer that brave feller, I have. What if the outlaw kills him an' sneaks off? I tell ye I'm after him!"

"Hould hard, now," warned Barney, squinting along the barrel of the old musket now aimed straight at the leader's breast. "Sure, it is a double handful of buckshot Oi have here, an ye want dhem."

"Give him ten minutes, anyhow," urged

Colonel Jim. "We would spoil it, if we rushed after them now. Heavens! only take Dick Darrel's wrongs home to yourself? Would you thank any one interfering? Well, I think not."

"Sure, it is half an hour he did be tellin' me to hould dhe crowd here," declared Barney, "and a half hour Oi'll hould ye, begob, av Oi have to shoot to do it. Moind phwat Oi say, now."

Colonel Jim, Doctor Conrad, Sinclair Fowley, and some others had now taken side with Barney, and held the pass against the crowd. It was a question that could be favorably argued from two standpoints, but the minority held the better hand—and they held the pass.

And it was hotly argued, too, but the silent argument of the drawn weapons prevailed.

Meanwhile, what of Dandy Dick and his hated foe?

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DUEL TO THE DEATH.

WHEN they dashed into the narrow pass, Craig Morgan was in the lead, but Dick was right at his heels.

There it was found considerably darker, but was sufficiently light for them to see their way, and there was no chance for the outlaw to escape, unless through some unforeseen accident to Dick.

Dick thought of every chance, and measured each one carefully.

It was not likely that Morgan would attempt to escape, yet he might, and take the desperate chance of being shot.

"Craig Morgan, don't you dare to try to escape me here," Dick warned. "If you do a bullet will speedily overtake you. You know whether I am a good shot or not."

"Don't worry; I'm not altogether a fool," was the retort, as both ran on. "I am ready to stop, whenever you say, and have it out with you. All I ask of you is even footing in the fight."

"And you shall have it, though you don't deserve it. I ought to shoot you down as I would a mad-dog."

"And brand yourself a coward, eh? Do so if you want to; you have it in your power."

"To shoot you would be poor revenge. Go on."

And on they ran, each spurred by a mighty motive, till the pass widened into a valley again, and before them lay a wooded glade.

It had been growing lighter all the time, and now there few were friendly shadows which the outlaw could have taken advantage of had he been so inclined, taking the risk of death at the same time.

Presently Dandy Dick ordered a halt, and Morgan stopped and faced around.

Both men were panting, and both sat down to gather strength for the deadly conflict which soon must come.

For several minutes neither spoke, but each regained breath and strength as speedily as possible, and nerved himself for the deadly strife.

Presently Dandy Dick rose, laid off hat, coat and vest, and removed his belt of weapons, which he had put on since making his identity known; and bared his right arm to the elbow.

These preparations made, he took up the two knives, his own and the outlaw's, and examined both.

Satisfied, he spoke to his foe, who had been watching him narrowly.

"Craig Morgan," he said, "the hour is come. There is no escape for you this time; you have got to meet me. I will arm you, and you can prepare. One of us dies here."

"I am ready for you," was the response. "But, hurry, for we may be followed, and you know what that would mean for me. I am unarmed, and they would easily take me, or shoot me before I could resist or escape. Let us make haste!"

"Ha, ha! As though you do not deserve the worst they could do to you. You make much of your one hope, I see. You think to kill me and escape. Well, your hope will make you a desperate foe, and one worthy of the avenger's steel. Stretch yourself, now, and take your time."

With the last words, Dick put the knife of his foe into his hands, and stepped back, holding his own in readiness.

The important moment had come, the moment for which Dick Darrel had waited so long.

Devil Duval tested his knife, thoroughly, suspicious of some trick, but found it to be in perfect condition, and laying it aside, proceeded to take off hat, coat and vest, as Dick had done.

Darrel waited, with arms folded, for the en-

counter, and presently Morgan took up his knife again and announced that he was ready.

A space of a dozen feet or so was between them.

"Stop where you are one minute," Dick ordered. "Craig Morgan, the hour of retribution has come. My purpose is to wreak vengeance upon you for the wrongs you have done me. Your life must pay the forfeit. Now, begin the attack, or I will."

"Ha, ha!" the villain laughed, hatefully. "You seem to feel sure of your victory. Don't forget to count me in! My sweet revenge against you has been complete, my hated rival, but if I can cap it with your life, so much the better. Come, and let us settle it."

And there, in that woody glade, with the light of the morning barely yet full upon the scene, Dandy Dick Darrel and outlaw Craig Morgan faced each other for the deadly strife, with none to witness.

Now eyes were fixed upon eyes, their knives were held in firm hand, and muscles tightened for the great effort of life or death.

Each took a step forward, at the same instant, then another, and in another instant the two powerful men sprung together, their knives ready for the awful purpose each intended.

The encounter was fierce indeed, the collision terrible, but neither gave an inch.

Their eyes had been fixed upon each other's, and their first effort was to avoid the first fierce blow. In this the outlaw succeeded, but not so Dick Darrel, wholly.

The point of Morgan's knife touched his shoulder, inflicting a stinging cut, but not a serious one.

That was all, then, and their hands were locked, the free hand of each holding the knife-hand of the other by the wrist.

Then began the awful, the terrible conflict—the conflict that could end only in death for one or both.

Not a word was spoken; breath was too precious to be wasted idly.

For a second they stood thus, holding each other; then the struggle for the mastery.

To and fro, back and forth, to and fro again, they swayed, now bending, now turning, straining every nerve and muscle in that awful duel.

Their breathing grew heavier, moment by moment, but they ceased not. To let up was useless, and neither dared to be the one to yield even the slightest degree of vantage.

As moment after moment passed, their struggles became hotter and more fierce, and now and again a hiss of hatred from Dick, or a muttered imprecation from Duval, was uttered with vengeful emphasis.

Suddenly Dick stepped upon a loose stone, his feet turned, and the accident nearly cost him his life.

He almost fell, but still clinging to his foe's wrist, Morgan was ready to fall upon him. In truth, Dick was nearly down, and the outlaw made every effort to push the advantage.

In the struggle, Dick's hold was weakened for a second, and Morgan's hand flew free, the knife in its grasp!

A look of devilish gloating lighted his Satanic face, and he made a quick stroke with the intention of driving the blade to the hilt in Dick's body.

The blow descended, but Dick had not been passive in that brief moment. He had closed with his foe, his arm about him, and as the knife descended, inflicting a flesh-wound in his back, Dick lifted him and fell upon him to the ground.

In the fall, Dick's hand, too, was freed, and then began the final death-wrestle.

All in one second, it seemed, and with the rapidity of light, their knives rose and fell a dozen times. Dick's back was scored horribly, while Duval's left arm and side were as badly cut.

But no fatal blow could yet be given, for the range was too close, and the left hand of each in some measure prevented the execution of the work of the right hand of the other. Both were wet with their own gore and the grass about them was beginning to be stained.

If Dick Darrel was a powerful man, so was Craig Morgan, as has been shown on divers occasions, and as strong men they fought.

Over and over they rolled, this way and that, and each passing second saw their knives plied with terrible force but with comparatively little effect so far as concerned immediately fatal result.

The men were panting heavily, and both were growing perceptibly weak, partly from the great exertion and partly from the loss of blood.

No stop was there, however, no cessation, even for a moment; then—

A single move, a Providential move, as it seemed, gave Dick a momentary supremacy. Morgan had partly raised from the ground, in a struggle to get Dick underneath, and unguardedly he used his elbow for support. At the instant he saw the mistake, but, too late! Dick's knife passed under him, point up, with fist and hilt braced against the ground, and hurling his whole weight upon his enemy at the same instant, the outlaw was pressed down and the keen blade was forced home!

Dick did not escape, wholly, for at the same moment the outlaw's knife was almost sheathed in his side!

With a gasp, the terrible Devil Duval relaxed his hold, falling back, limp and lifeless, while Dandy Dick struggled partly up, lifted one hand toward heaven, and gasped:

"Rose, my—my wife! Anita, my sister! my boy! you are avenged at last! By—by my—my—"

But his strength failed him, and he fell senseless across the body of his dead foe.

His terrible death-trail for vengeance was done!

CHAPTER XX.

BARNEY'S SURPRISING STAND.

WHILE this was going on, the situation at the narrow pass had remained the same.

Barney O'Linn and those with him held back the crowd, in spite of all protest, and were determined to hold them for the full fifteen minutes, at least.

It seemed an age, before this time was up, but at last Colonel Jim Hoxley announced that it had expired, and lowered his weapons. He, it must be confessed, could stand the suspense no longer.

And terrible it had been for Barney, too, for he knew not but that his master might be sorely in need of help. No sooner had Hoxley lowered his weapons, then, when all the rest did the same, and with one accord all dashed into the pass, Barney in the lead.

"Ther blood of yer master be on yer head, if he has got ther wu'st of it!" exclaimed Ham Stanton, sternly.

And many more voiced the same sentiment, but with such men as Sinclair Fowley, Doctor Conrad and others siding with the young Irishman and Colonel Jim, the sentiment could amount to nothing more than a threat.

Through the pass they rushed, pushing and shoving one another in their eager haste, and were soon out into the wider part where their advantages were more equal.

Hurry as they would, however, not a man of them could distance Barney in the race, and he it was who first discovered the scene of the terrible conflict.

Without a second's pause he dashed on, and in a moment more the heart-stricken Barney was kneeling at the motionless Dandy Dick's side.

"Oh! me masther, me masther! Can it be dhat dhis murtherin' son av dhe devil has kilted ye!" he wailed.

Dick had just come out of a swoon, and opening his eyes, saw the face of his faithful ally bending over him.

"Tank God it is aloive ye are!" Barney cried.

"I—I have killed him," Dick faintly spoke.

"Begorra, but ye have dhat same!" Barney shouted. "Happy must be dhis hour for you, Dick Darrel!"

The crowd was now around them, and suddenly a new light shone in the wounded detective's eyes, and with an effort he clutched Barney's arm.

"Phwat is it?" Barney asked.

The noise was so great that he had to lean low to catch the whispered words.

"I—I may be dying," Dick gasped; "I don't know. But, Barney, don't—don't allow that—that man, that Doctor Conrad, to come near me! Don't let him touch me! I command it! Kill him—rather than—than—"

He did not finish. His eyes rolled back, his head fell, and he was again in a swoon.

At that instant Doctor Conrad pushed his way to the front, and now exclaimed.

"I believe the poor fellow is dying! Out of the way there, young man, and let me see if anything can be done for—"

He had given Barney a push, as he spoke, and was taking command of the situation in a most imperative manner, but he was suddenly brought to a stop. Barney, recovering from the push, thrust forward his big musket, pressed its muzzle against the doctor's neck, and cried:

"Stand back dhere, ye spalpeen! Don't ye lay wan finger on me masther, an' ye don't want

me to shoot dhe head cl'ane off ye, as Oi will as sure as me name is Barney O'Linn!"

Doctor Conrad paled to the lips, and fell back.

"What do you mean?" he cried.

"Be hivvins, Oi can't make it any plainer nor dhat," Barney answered.

"But, I am a doctor, the only one in the place, and maybe I can save your master's life!"

"Oi don't care phwat ye are!" Barney fiercely rejoined, "Oi tell ye to stand back! Don't ye lay a finger on him, for av ye do, begorra Oi'll fill ye full to dhe guzzle wid buckshot!"

Everybody was amazed at this action on the part of Barney, and Colonel Jim Hoxley now interfered.

"This is unreasonable, young man," he declared. "Your master needs immediate help, and his life may depend on it. This man is a doctor, and he must be allowed to—"

"Divil a bit av it!" Barney protested. "Don't ye let him come, or it's a dead man he'll be. Sure Oi know me masther needs help, an' Oi'll be obliged to ye av some av ye will see to him; but divil a step near him goes dhis doctor!"

"What is your reason for this, you fool?" the doctor thundered.

"Begob, but it is only carryin' out me masther's orders Oi am," Barney made reply, "an sure he tould me to kill ye rather dhan let ye touch him."

Once again did Doctor Conrad turn pale as with an oath he cried:

"Well, let him have his way and die, if you want to; I'll have nothing to do with him."

Colonel Jim Hoxley had looked at Barney keenly, upon his making that explanation, and from him to the doctor. What he thought did not appear.

"Well, somebody must help him, that is positive," he exclaimed. "Come, you!" to Ham Stanton; "let's you and I take it in hand."

Barney stepped away to allow them full liberty, and speedily they lifted Dandy Dick from the body of his fallen foe and laid him tenderly upon the grass near by.

A speedy examination was made; the wounds were somewhat stanchd from bleeding, and then were carefully dressed. There was but one that of itself could prove fatal, but that one was so deep and ugly that hope seemed useless.

While this was going on, the crowd around was in a wild uproar. The dreaded outlaw lay dead at their feet, while the victor was perhaps dying; and the unexpected action taken by the young Irishman had set everybody to talking. Why had Dick Darrel given such a remarkable order respecting Doctor Conrad? No one could answer the question, try as they might.

As for the doctor, he had retired to a little distance; his brow was dark and his manner sullen. A little group was around him, but he could give no explanation of the matter. Why his well-meant offer of services should have been disregarded, he could not tell. And if he could not explain it, needless for any one else to try. Barney O'Linn declared again and again that he knew nothing whatever of his master's reason; he had simply obeyed orders.

CHAPTER XXI.

WORDS IN CONCLUSION.

DANDY DICK was laid on a rude stretcher hastily extemporized, and was carried back to the village, Barney walking at his side, and the dead outlaw was brought in by others in the same manner, a little later on.

On the way in, Barney had made arrangements with a miner for the use of his cabin, which was nearer than the hotels, and when they reached it, Dick was carried tenderly in and laid on the rude but not uncomfortable couch; and this was much against the wishes of Sinclair Fowley, who had offered a room in his hotel, free of cost.

But, Barney acting for his master, and backing his arguments with his big musket, it had to be as he said. When his master got better, then if he wanted to make different arrangements, well and good; but for the present, Barney was boss. Nor did he state his reasons, beyond some very vague ones that he wanted to nurse his master in his own way.

The truth was, Barney's suspicion was aroused by the action his master had taken against Doctor Conrad, and he wanted to have Dick all to himself—as much as possible under his own eye and keeping.

The body of Devil Duval was taken on to the public square of the village, where, as soon as the news was made known, the people of the town collected.

To picture the scenes that followed were im-

possible. The joy was great that Craig Morgan was dead.

The two women, Mary Warne and Pearl Mayne, went down and looked at the face of their hated enemy, and having satisfied themselves of the truth of the report, hastened off to help Barney.

Events must be passed over hastily, to crowd them into the limits of the allotted space. That day was a wild one at Nip-n-Tuck. The body of the outlaw was not buried at once, but was kept for thorough identification, persons being sent for from a distance to come and see it.

The leading citizens of the village held something of a jubilee over the event, Doctor Conrad, Gaspar Corker, Baldwin Bloome, George Pierre, Goodman Crawley, Sinclair Fowley, and even the Rev. Ambrose Bray taking part. The latter was a badly injured man. He had not got over the shock of the imposition the outlaw had played upon him, and his face was long and woe-begone indeed.

By the following day, many had arrived who had seen the outlaw, and his identity was established beyond all doubt. So the body was buried. The news was sent forth in every direction, and there was rejoicing all around, for Devil Duval had made himself a terror to the country at large. So far as could be learned, there was only one man who regretted his death, and that was Sinclair Fowley. He wished that he could have been made to tell what he had done with the stolen bullion, before he died.

Fowley still persisted that it must have been the outlaw who had robbed the mine, for suspicion could fall on no one else. And, too, the Invisible Seven—he certainly must have been at the head of that band, it was argued. And if so, was it not probable that danger would follow for the people of Nip-n-Tuck? This seemed so probable, and the matter looked so important, that another public meeting was held, in which the leading spirits of the place took part, with Doctor Conrad in the chair, and suitable resolutions were passed.

Oh! if the true inwardness of things there could have been known—known to Ham Stanton! The work of Dandy Dick Darrel was by no means ended.

On the second day after the duel, and not till then, Dick regained consciousness. He was exceedingly weak, and life hung in the balance. But he was receiving the best of care, the best that Barney and the two brave women could give, and if good nursing would count for anything, there was a chance for his recovery. And it was on this second day, too, that another person joined his little company of devoted allies, none other than the Chinaman, Yang Kee. He announced that he had left Doctor Conrad, and explained that it was purposely to serve the "blave 'Melican man." As he had already proved his liking for Dick, and he seemed so anxious, his offer was accepted, the more readily as he declared he well knew how to doctor wounds, and to attend the sick. That he indeed was a better nurse than they was soon evident, for, with singular knowledge of medicinal herbs and washes, he made the patient so comfortable, and so strengthened him with cunningly prepared teas and broths, that Dick rallied amazingly, and in a day or two more was past all immediate danger.

In a few days more, under Yang Kee's skillful treatment, and almost ceaseless vigilance, the great detective was on the way to rapid recovery—at which everybody rejoiced, and no one more than the irrepressible Barney, who declared the Chinaman "was a saint wid a pig-tail, an' a friend to tie to, begob!—a sentiment that Dick most heartily indorsed.

Colonel Jim Hoxley having finished the business that had brought him to Nip-n-Tuck, had returned home, and through him the reward for the outlaw had been collected, and the amount turned over to Dick. He in turn at once gave it to his allies.

And the two women, their direct interest at an end, and their help being no longer needed, departed. They had seen Craig Morgan dead, and that ended their mission of vengeance.

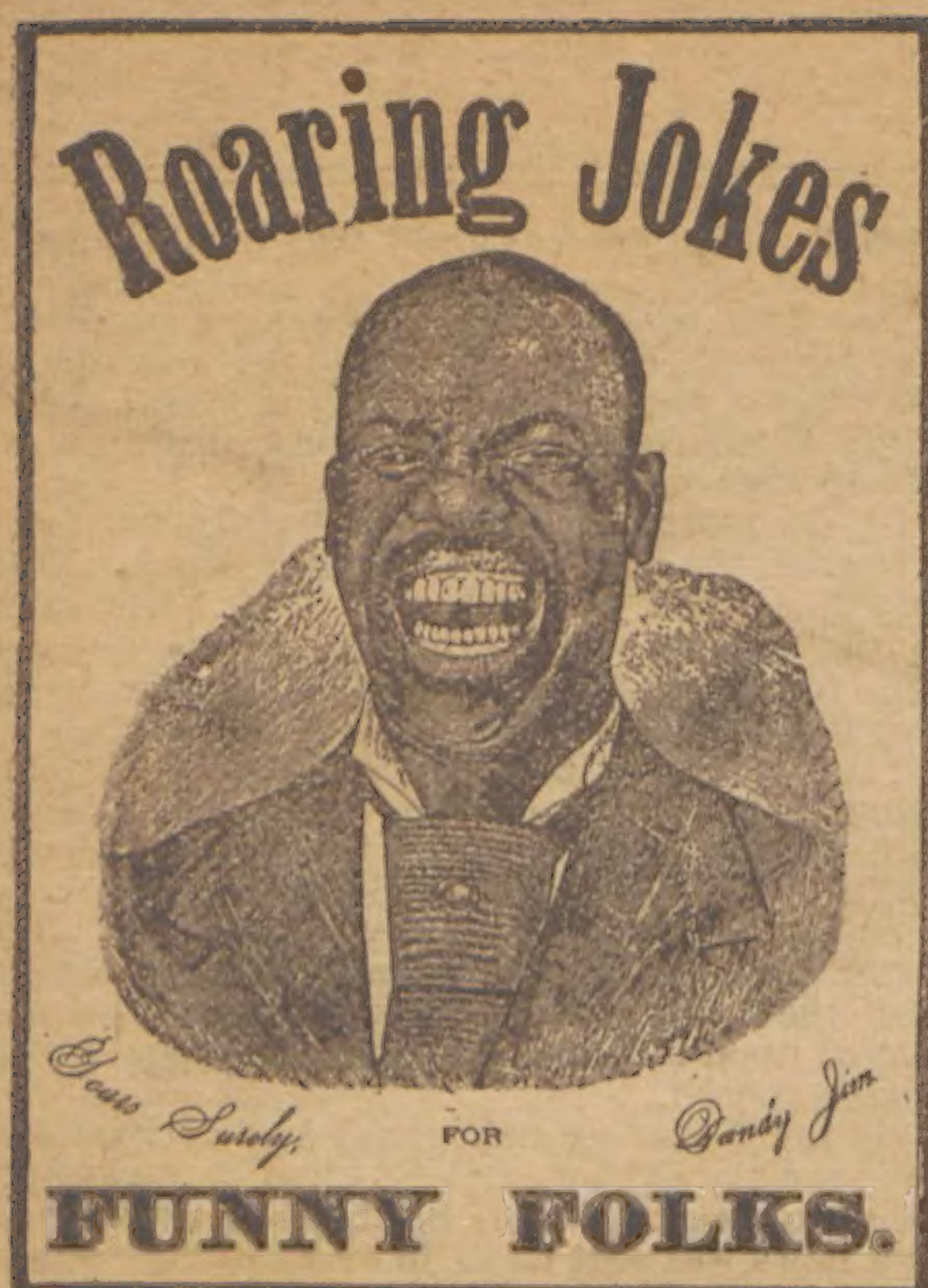
Did it also end Dick Darrel's career as detective and outlaw-hunter? It would seem not, for what meant this solemn appeal to Barney and Yang Kee? "Don't leave me alone one minute, night or day," he enjoined, "but guard my life with your own till I am able to take care of myself again."

Was he conscious of the near presence of other foes who demanded his life?

And were these foes the Invisible Seven?

We shall see.

THE END.



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